

Colorado



School Safety Resource Center
Department of Public Safety

ESSENTIALS OF SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT: PREVENTING TARGETED SCHOOL VIOLENCE

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This document is intended as guidance to Colorado schools and was created with collaboration from the Threat Assessment Work Group of the Colorado School Safety Resource Center. Consultation with district legal counsel and local law enforcement is recommended. Additional consultation and template formats may also be obtained from the Colorado School Safety Resource Center, Department of Public Safety.

With Thanks to Participating Threat Assessment Work Group Agencies

Academy 20 School District

Adams 12 Five Start Schools

Aurora Public Schools

Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, CU-Boulder

Cherry Creek School District

Colorado Department of Education

Colorado School Safety Resource Center, Department of Public Safety

Denver Public Schools

Jefferson County School District

Jefferson County Juvenile Assessment Center

Mapleton School District

John Nicoletti, Ph.D., Nicoletti-Flater and Associates, Inc.

Safe2Tell



I: Elements of a School Threat Assessment Process

Information about the behavior and communications of the student of concern should be gathered and analyzed by the authorities involved in a threat assessment inquiry or investigation. This information will permit reasonable judgments about whether the student of concern is moving along a path toward attack on an identifiable target.

The following four elements are essential to the development and operation of an effective school safety threat assessment process:

- 1. ESTABLISH AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY.**
 - 2. DEVELOP A MULTIDISCIPLINARY THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM THAT IS BASED IN THE SCHOOL OR DISTRICT AND PROVIDE ONGOING TRAINING.**
 - 3. ESTABLISH INTEGRATED AND INTERAGENCY SYSTEMS RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS TO RESPOND TO PUBLIC SAFETY CONCERNS.**
 - 4. PROVIDE AWARENESS TRAINING FOR STAFF, STUDENTS, PARENTS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS IN WARNING SIGNS OF VIOLENCE AND REPORTING PROCEDURES.**
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Explanation of Elements of a School Threat Assessment Process

1. ESTABLISH AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP TO CONDUCT AN INQUIRY

- a. Formal policy and procedures are recommended to authorize school officials to conduct a threat assessment inquiry when any behavior of a student deviates from the norm and may pose a threat.
- b. Building and district leadership should support, create, and designate the threat assessment team(s). The building/district team also acts as an information “vortex” for student concerns and for record keeping.
- c. Information sharing must support the school threat assessment process
 - (1) Information must be gathered from various sources during the inquiry
 - (2) Consider options for storing the information in an accessible format and keep information in a central location
- d. Legal issues regarding information sharing requires advance consideration. Consult with legal counsel and create appropriate memorandums of understanding. Training must be provided to involved school staff and agency personnel.
 - (1) FERPA allows for various exceptions to privacy protection that have relevance to threat assessment inquiries: Section 99.36 (December, 2008) makes clear that educational agencies and institutions may disclose information from educational records to appropriate parties, including parents, whose knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of a student or another individuals if there is a significant and articulable threat to the health or safety of a student or other individual, considering the totality of the circumstances.
 - (2) Colorado statutes (HB 00-1119 and SB 00-133) provide schools, and other agencies working with juveniles, encouragement for open communication among appropriate agencies, including criminal justice agencies, assessment centers for children, school districts, and schools in order to assist disruptive children and to maintain safe schools. 22-32-109.1(3) C.R.S.
 1. *Colorado law mandates that each board of education cooperate, and to the extent possible, develop written agreements with law enforcement officials, the juvenile justice system, and social services to identify the public safety concerns for information sharing. The Colorado Office of the Attorney General has developed guidance, in the form of a Model Interagency Agreement for the effective implementation of HB 00-1119 and SB 00-133.*
Model Interagency Agreement can be found at http://www.coloradoattorneygeneral.gov/initiatives/youth_violence_prevention/interagency_cooperation



2. DEVELOP A MULTIDISCIPLINARY THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM THAT IS BASED IN THE SCHOOL OR DISTRICT AND PROVIDE ONGOING TRAINING

- a. Multidisciplinary and interagency teams may already exist and respond or intervene in a wide variety of situations.
- b. Roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined for threat assessment, including the leadership of the team.
 - (1) An information “vortex” should be identified as a central clearinghouse for student concerns and record keeping.
- c. Teams should be trained together in the use of best practices and lessons learned.
 - (1) Tabletops or experiential exercises are recommended.
- d. The primary role of the team is to guide the assessment and management of the situation of concern, and to provide ongoing monitoring.
- e. Suggested membership of a trained multi-disciplinary team includes:
 - (1) No less than 3 members to counsel with, with at least 2 being onsite, including:
 - (2) A senior, respected, and trained member of the administration who chairs the team, or designee who is trained and chairs the team
 - (3) School disciplinary or safety personnel assigned to school (or faculty member with training)
 - (4) A mental health professional, such as a school psychologist, social worker, or counselor with training in threat assessment (may also facilitate the team)
 - (5) Local Law Enforcement contact
 - (6) Others who may be able to contribute to the process, such as:
 1. *guidance counselors*
 2. *teachers, coaches who know the student well*
 3. *nurses*
 4. *transportation bus drivers*
 5. *custodial and cafeteria staff*
 6. *representative from IEP team, if applicable*
 7. *community members with information, such as:*
 - a) probation officers
 - b) social service workers
 - c) experts and consultants or
 - d) others providing service or knowledge of the student (i.e. therapists)

****Note:** Suicide assessments must be conducted by a trained professional.



3. ESTABLISH INTEGRATED AND INTERAGENCY SYSTEMS RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS TO RESPOND TO PUBLIC SAFETY CONCERNS

- a. Community system relationships and relationships between individuals are required.
- b. Individuals who can serve as “boundary spanners” are critical to interagency relationships, developing written protocols, facilitating meetings, and resolution of any conflicts.
- c. Interagency Information Sharing Agreements are suggested by Colorado Law to identify public safety concerns for each community (HB 00-1119).
- d. Identify Interagency Team support and clarify roles.
 - Interagency Social Support Teams (ISST) or other integrated services teams (Collaborative Management Program, HB 04-1451) may help to develop Action and Support Plans or to provide needed community services.
 - Collaborative Management Program Portal
<http://clientportal.omni.org/0-9/1451cmp/Pages/Welcome1451.aspx>

4. PROVIDE AWARENESS TRAINING FOR STAFF, STUDENTS, PARENTS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS IN WARNING SIGNS OF VIOLENCE AND REPORTING PROCEDURES

- a. Behavior of concern or threat to public safety, the safety and welfare of a student, the school or community must be reported to school officials in a timely manner.
- b. Reporting procedure must be clear and use a common language.
- c. Multiple means of reporting should be encouraged (i.e. tiplines, calling, texting, tell a trusted adult).
- d. Use of Safe2Tell Anonymous Reporting Line is strongly encouraged.
- e. Breaking the Code of Silence must be reinforced: Telling keeps people safe.
- f. Training should be updated and repeated yearly.

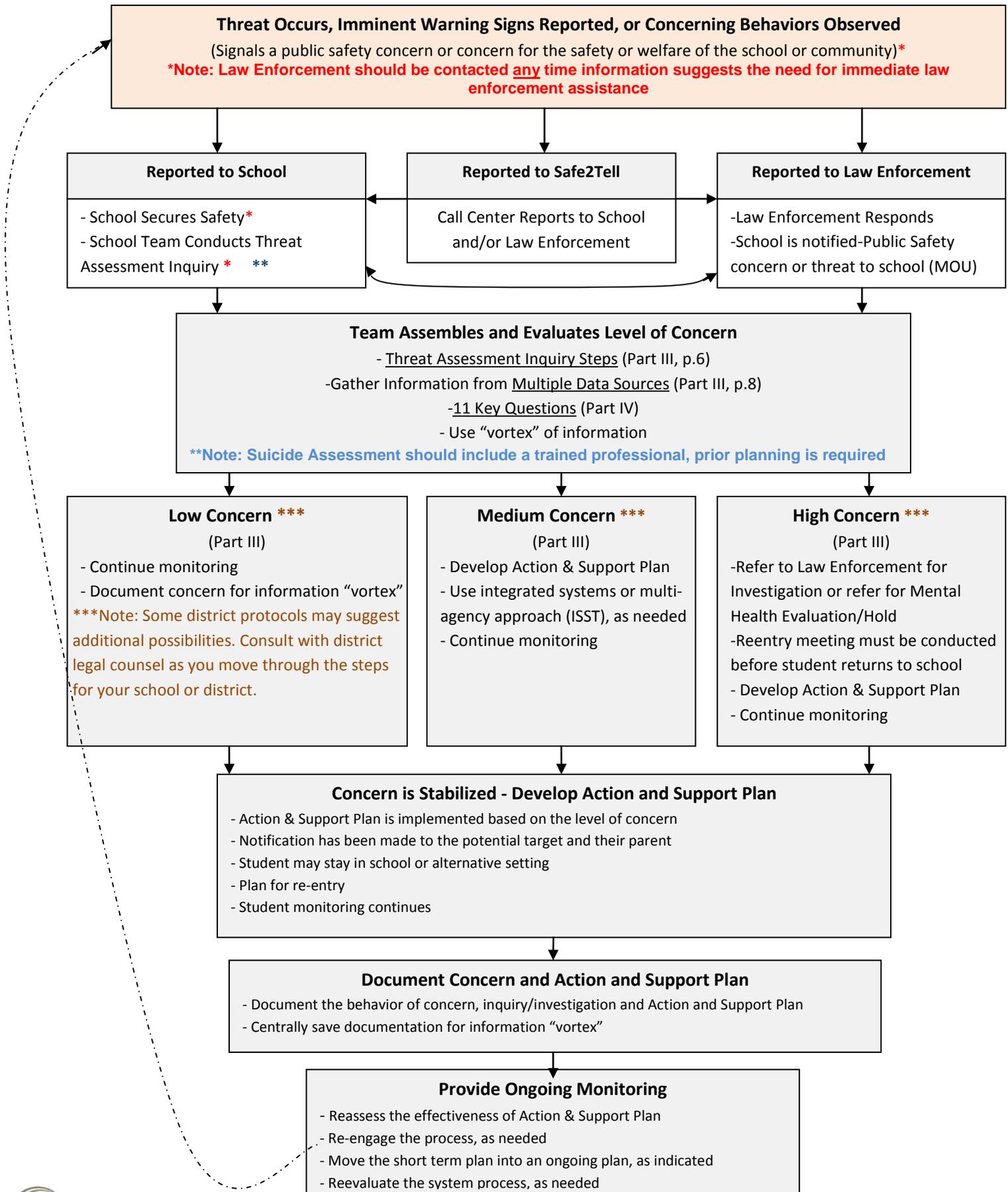
Adapted from:

Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools Program and U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center. A complete copy of the guide is available online at <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf>.



II. THE CYCLE OF THREAT ASSESSMENT**

Refer to: Essentials of School Threat Assessment: I). Elements of Threat Assessment Process, III). Threat Assessment Inquiry Steps and IV). 11 Key Questions (U.S. Secret Service)



III. Threat Assessment Inquiry Steps

An inquiry should be initiated immediately in any situation of concern. The threat assessment team should also consider: “How much time do we have? “ If at any time information suggests the need for law enforcement assistance, that assistance should be requested immediately.

When a student’s behavior or report of behavior and communications deviates from normal behavior for student’s peers, and indicates concern to this student’s safety or the safety of others, school officials should initiate a threat assessment inquiry for prevention of targeted school violence. The safety of the school, the student and the community is a priority consideration. The student of concern should be immediately and safely contained, based on the severity of the concern, until safety procedures are initiated and assessment process is activated.

Care should be exercised to ensure that a student of concern is treated appropriately, since any allegations regarding the behavior or perceived dangerousness of the student may be unfounded.

The Six Principles of Threat Assessment (Fein, et al., 2002)

1. Targeted violence is the end result of an understandable process of thinking and behavior.
2. Targeted violence stems from an interaction between the individual, the situation, the setting, and the target.
3. *An investigative, skeptical, inquisitive mindset is needed.*
4. Effective threat assessment is based on facts, rather than characteristics or “traits.”
5. An “integrated systems approach” is best.
6. Investigate whether or not a student *poses* a threat, not whether a student has *made* a threat.

Basic threat assessment inquiry steps include:

1. **ASSEMBLE THE THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM.**
 2. **GATHER A VARIETY OF INFORMATION.**
 3. **USE MULTIPLE DATA SOURCES.**
 4. **ORGANIZE AND ANALYZE THE INFORMATION.**
 5. **DETERMINE THE LEVEL OF CONCERN LEADING TO AN ACTION PLAN.**
 6. **DEVELOP AN ACTION AND SUPPORT PLAN.**
 7. **DOCUMENT THE THREAT ASSESSMENT AND KEEP RECORDS FOR THE INFORMATION “VORTEX”.**
 8. **CONTINUE MONITORING OF THE STUDENT AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PLAN.**
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Explanation of Threat Assessment Inquiry Steps

1. ASSEMBLE THE THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM

a. Suggested membership of a trained multi-disciplinary team includes:

- (1) No less than 3 members to counsel with, with at least 2 being onsite , including:
- (2) A senior, respected, and trained member of the administration who chairs the team, or designee who is trained and chairs the team
- (3) School disciplinary or safety personnel assigned to school (or faculty member with training)
- (4) A mental health professional, such as a school psychologist, social worker, or counselor with training in threat assessment (may also facilitate the team)
- (5) Local Law Enforcement contact
- (6) Others who may be able to contribute to the process, such as:
 1. *guidance counselors*
 2. *teachers, coaches who know the student well*
 3. *nurses*
 4. *transportation bus drivers*
 5. *custodial and cafeteria staff*
 6. *representative from IEP team, if applicable*
 7. *community members with information, such as:*
 - a) probation officers
 - b) social service workers
 - c) experts and consultants or
 - d) others providing service or knowledge of the student (i.e. therapists)

- **Note:** Suicide assessments must be conducted by a trained professional.



2. GATHER A VARIETY OF INFORMATION

a. The facts that drew attention to the student, the situation and the targets.

- (1) How did the student come to the attention of school officials?
- (2) What were the triggering events and possible targets?
- (3) What behaviors and/or communications were reported, and by whom?
- (4) What was the situation?
- (5) Who, if anyone, witnessed the reported behavior of concern?
- (6) What was the context for the reported behavior, i.e. what else was going on at the time of the reported behavior?

b. Information about the student.

(1) Identifying Information:

1. *Name*
2. *Physical description (hair color, scars, clothes, etc.)*
3. *Date of birth, and*
4. *Identification numbers: student ID, etc.*

(2) Background information:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Residences</i> | 9. <i>History of having been a victim of violence or bullying</i> |
| 2. <i>Family/home situation</i> | 10. <i>Known attitudes toward violence</i> |
| 3. <i>Academic performance</i> | 11. <i>Triggering events</i> |
| 4. <i>Criminal behavior and law enforcement history</i> | 12. <i>Possible targets</i> |
| 5. <i>Social networks</i> | 13. <i>Mental Health/substance abuse history</i> |
| 6. <i>History of relationships and conflicts</i> | 14. <i>Access to and use of weapons</i> |
| 7. <i>History of harassing others or of being harassed by others</i> | 15. <i>History or grievances and grudges</i> |
| 8. <i>History of violence toward self and others</i> | 16. <i>History of response to interventions</i> |
| | 17. <i>History of inhibitors to aggression</i> |

(3) Current life information:

1. *Present stability of living and home situations*
2. *Nature and quality of current relationships and personal support*
3. *Recent losses or losses of status (shame, humiliation, recent breakup or loss of significant relationship)*
4. *Current grievances or grudges*
5. *Perceptions of being treated unfairly*
6. *Known difficulty coping with a stressful event*
7. *Any progression in social, academic, behavioral, or psychological functioning*
8. *Recent hopelessness, desperation, and/or despair, including suicidal thoughts, gestures, actions, or attempts*
9. *Pending crises or change in circumstances*
10. *Note whether the student has any trusting relationships with adults who are emotionally available to him or her.*
11. *If there is an adult who is “connected” to the student, that adult may have useful information about the student’s thinking and behavior and may also have the ability to disrupt the negative behavior patterns of the student.*



c. Information about boundary probing and “attack-related” behaviors

Examination of the thinking and behaviors of school shooters suggests that most attacks are preceded by discernible behaviors, as the student plans or prepares for the attack. These behaviors are referred to as boundary probing or attack-related behaviors.

Behaviors that should raise concern about potential violence include:

- (1) Ideas or plans about injuring him/herself or attacking a school or persons at school;
- (2) Communications (including via any technological means) or writings that suggest that the student has an unusual or worrisome interest in school attacks;
- (3) Comments that express or imply the student is considering mounting an attack at school, or has made a threat, written or verbal, to his safety or the safety of others;
- (4) Recent weapon-seeking behavior, especially if weapon-seeking is linked to ideas about attack or expressions about interest in attack;
- (5) Communications or writings suggesting the student condones or is considering violence to redress a grievance or solve a problem; and
- (6) Rehearsals of attacks or ambushes.

d. Motives

Communicated motives for attack behaviors to self or others have included:

- (1) Revenge for a perceived injury or grievance;
- (2) Yearning for attention, recognition, or notoriety;
- (3) A wish to solve a problem otherwise seen as unbearable; and
- (4) A desire to die or be killed.

Knowledge of the communications or writings of a student of concern may help the threat assessment team in evaluating the risk of targeted violence. Understanding the circumstances that may have prompted a student to consider attacking others may permit authorities to direct the student away from violence.

e. Target Selection

Information about a student’s targets may provide clues to the student’s motives, planning and attack-related behaviors.



3. USE MULTIPLE DATA SOURCES

a. Obtain School Information

A school threat assessment inquiry should begin with what is known about the student from school records, teacher interviews, classmates and other information such as history from previous schools. Out of school information, including technology sources, parents/families' information, law enforcement, and mental health records, if available, are also important. In utilizing information from school records in a threat assessment inquiry, the threat assessment team should follow school policies and relevant laws regarding information-sharing.

Answers to the following questions may be drawn from information at school:

- (1) Is the student well known to any adult at the school?
- (2) Has the student come to attention for any behavior of concern? If so, what? (Email, texting, website, posters, papers, class assignments, rule-breaking, violence, harassment, adjustment problems, depression or despair, acting-out behavior, etc.)
- (3) Has the student experience serious difficulties or been in distress?
- (4) Is there anyone with whom the student share worries frustrations and/or sorrows?
- (5) Is there information that the student has considered ending his or her life?
- (6) Has the student been a victim and/or initiator of hostile, harassing or bullying behavior directed toward other students, teachers, or other staff?
- (7) Is the student known to have an interest in weapons? If so, has he or she made efforts to acquire or use weapons? Does the student live in a home where there are weapons (whether or not the weapons are secured)?

b. Interview the Student of Concern

Interviews with a student of concern oftentimes are critical in a threat assessment inquiry. School administrators and law enforcement officials and their respective legal counsels should follow existing policies, or develop policies regarding interviews with students of concern.

The primary purpose of a student interview is to learn about the student's thinking, motives, and behavior. The tone of the interview should be professional, neutral, and non-confrontational, rather than accusatory or judgmental. Student safety should be maintained as a priority while waiting for or during interview.

Issues that should be considered include:

- (1) When and who to notify parents/guardians of an interview;
- (2) Whether or when to invite parents/guardians to be present during an interview;
- (3) Whether and how to use information from an interview for criminal justice proceedings; and
- (4) Whether and when legal representation should be allowed, offered or provided
- (5) The search of a student in any context is a sensitive and complex issue that should be examined thoroughly by school administrators and their legal counsel and should be addressed in school policies and in accordance with law.

Conducting an interview with a student of concern, the threat assessment team should:

- (1) Be well acquainted with the facts that brought the student to the attention of school administrators and others
- (2) Have reviewed available information concerning the student's background, interests, and behaviors. Knowledge of background information concerning the student prior to the interview may help the threat assessment team judge whether the student is forthcoming and straightforward. Generally, a



student should be asked directly about his or her intentions. An interview can also send the message to the student that his or her behavior has been noticed and has caused concern.

Additional resource for interview guidance: Cornell, D. & Sheras, P. (2006). Guidelines for responding to student threats of violence. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

c. Interview Others Who Know the Student of Concern

Students and adults who know the student who is the subject of the threat assessment inquiry should be asked about communications or other behaviors that may indicate the student of concern's ideas or intent.

The focus of these interviews should be factual:

- (1) What was said? To whom?
- (2) What was written? To whom?
- (3) What was done?
- (4) When and where did this occur?
- (5) Who else observed this behavior?
- (6) Did the student say who he or she acted as they did?

d. Interview the Parent/Guardian

The parents or guardians of the student of concern should be interviewed in most cases. Parents may be protective of their children, frightened and/or embarrassed about the inquiry and the possibility that their child may be contemplating a violent act. The threat assessment team therefore should make it clear to the student's parent, or guardians that the objective of the threat assessment inquiry is not only to help prevent targeted school violence and diminish the chance that the student and possibly others would be harmed, but also to *help their child* and protect the safety of others. The threat assessment team should seek the help of the student's parents in understanding the student's actions and interests, recognizing that parents may or may not know much about their child's thinking and behavior.

- (1) Questions for parents should focus on the student's behaviors and communications, especially those that might be attack-related.
- (2) Parent should be encouraged to explore all methods of their child's communications including internet messaging, cell phone communications, and postings on social network sites such as Facebook and MySpace.
- (3) The students' interest in weapons should be explored, as well as his or her access to weapons at home.

e. Obtain Outside Sources of Information

Information may come to the attention of schools through outside sources such as community organizations, clubs, other schools, and anonymous reporting lines, such as Safe2Tell.

f. Interview the Potential Target

Individuals who have been identified as potential targets of the students of concern should also be interviewed. The primary purpose of that interview is to gather information about any possible situation of concern.



4. ORGANIZE AND ANALYZE THE INFORMATION– ALSO SEE THREAT ASSESSMENT INQUIRY: SECRET SERVICE ELEVEN KEY QUESTIONS (SECTION IV)

- a. Information gathered should be examined for evidence of behavior and conditions that suggest the student of concern is planning for an attack. Is the behavior of the student consistent with movement on a path toward attack?
 - b. Do the student's current situation and setting incline him or her toward or away from targeted violence?
 - c. Consider if the student behavior is:
 - (1) normal behavior,
 - (2) boundary probing behavior,
 - (3) attack-related behavior, or
 - (4) attack behavior
 - d. Other assessment tools may also be used to help organize the information (See Selected Threat Assessment Resource List)
- **Note:** Suicide Assessments must be conducted by trained professionals

Threat Assessment Inquiry: Secret Service Eleven Key Questions (See Section IV)

1. What are the student's motives and goals?
2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?
3. Has the subject shown inappropriate interest in school attacks or attackers, weapons, incidents of mass violence?
4. Has the student engaged in attack related behaviors?
5. Does the student have the capacity to carry out the act?
6. Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation or despair?
7. Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?
8. Does the student see violence as an acceptable or desirable way to solve problems?
9. Is the student's conversation and "story" consistent with their actions?
10. Are other people concerned about the student's potential for violence?
11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of violence?



5. DETERMINE THE LEVEL OF CONCERN LEADING TO AN ACTION PLAN - THREE BASIC POSSIBILITIES*

a. Low Concern –

- (1) If there is enough reliable information to answer the 11 Key Questions; and,
- (2) The weight of the information is convincing that the student does not pose a threat of targeted school violence nor display any indicators of proactive violence then;
- (3) The threat assessment team may conclude the threat assessment inquiry at this time, and continue monitoring.

b. Medium Concern: Referral and Planning of Support Services and Monitoring -

- (1) The Threat Assessment team may decide to close the assessment process, but conclude that the student is still in need of assistance with problems or behaviors. An Action and Support Plan needs to be developed and documented. In this case, the team should work with school and district administrators, school and district services, community partners, and others to ensure that these individuals receive assistance, continued support, and monitoring. Please note that an IEP process is separate from both the threat assessment and an Action and Support Plan. The plan should be reviewed periodically and monitoring should continue while the student remains in the system.

c. High Concern: Referral to Law Enforcement for Investigation or to Mental/Behavioral Health Professionals for Immediate Evaluation and/or Hold – when information suggests that a crime has occurred or there is cause for a mandatory reporting.

- (1) If there is sufficient information for the threat assessment team to be reasonably certain that the student poses a threat to self or others; or
- (2) The student appears to be on a path to attack; then
- (3) The team should immediately refer to the appropriate law enforcement agency for a threat assessment investigation or mental/behavioral professionals for evaluation and/or hold.
- (4) A re-entry meeting must be conducted before the student returns to school to develop a school and community based Action and Support Plan. The plan should establish review dates, provide connection to district and community mental health professionals and provide monitoring measures.

As the Threat Assessment Inquiry moves to an Investigation Status, and law enforcement has been notified, the team might continue to ask themselves the following questions:

- (1) Does the information collected prompt more concern or less concern about the possibility that a student is moving on a path of attack?
- (2) What information might prompt less concern?
- (3) What information might heighten concern?
- (4) What options exist for intervening in the behavior of or redirecting the student away from ideas of or plans for a school attack?
- (5) How should potential targets be contacted, warned, and protected?
- (6) It is suggested that you consult with your school district's attorney about the "duty to warn and/or protect."



***Note: Some district protocols may suggest additional possibilities. Consult with school district legal counsel as you move through the steps for your school or district.**

6. DEVELOP AN ACTION AND SUPPORT PLAN

An Action and Support Plan can be developed for any situation, but should be developed if evaluation indicates medium level concern and/or upon re-entry of student of high concern. The purpose is to provide management of the situation, to protect and aid possible targets, and to provide support and guidance to help the student deal successfully with his or her problems. The plan also aids in monitoring of the student in the short-term and long-term. Strategies selected should have the best potential for long-term preventative power. The focus of the process is to connect the student to services and support systems that reduce the likelihood of future threatening behavior.

- a. Select actions and interventions related to the level of concern.
- b. Notify the potential target and their parents.
- c. Consider the history of previous actions, consequences, and interventions and evaluate their effectiveness.
- d. Start with an intense plan as needed, and then adjust based on progress. Timelines for review of progress can be short, if needed.
- e. Specify consequences, monitoring and supervision strategies, support for skill development and relationship building
- f. Maximize the resources of the student, family, community agencies, other intervention providers, etc.
- g. Use community collaborative teams for intervention planning or further assessment, as indicated. (See Part I)
- h. If additional formal assessment is part of the plan, obtain parent permission as necessary.
- i. Build-in formal follow-up meetings to review progress and response to the plan
- j. Adjust plans as necessary

7. DOCUMENT THE THREAT ASSESSMENT AND KEEP RECORDS

Regardless of the outcome of the Threat Assessment Inquiry, the Threat Assessment Team should document the behavior of concern, the inquiry process, and any actions taken. The school and/or district should have a central “vortex” for the information record keeping, such as an administrator and/or team who would have previous records and information if future concerns are raised.

- a. This should be carried out in compliance with any applicable school or other relevant policies and/or legal considerations and should include a record of sources and content for all key information considered in the threat assessment, as well as the date that the information was acquired.
- b. It also is important to document the reasoning that led the threat assessment team to its decision.
- c. A well-documented record provides baseline information and can be useful if the student comes to authorities’ attention again, or if at some point in the future, investigators or school personnel need to determine whether the subject has changed patterns of thinking and behavior.
- d. This documentation can also be an asset in demonstration that a threat assessment process was conducted properly and in compliance with applicable laws, policies, and procedures.

8. CONTINUE MONITORING OF THE STUDENT AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ACTION AND SUPPORT PLAN



Threat Assessment: Inquiry Steps

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- a. Transition the short-term plan to a longer-term plan, as indicated
- b. Reevaluate the plan and the system process, as needed.

Adapted from:

Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools Program and U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center. A complete copy of the guide is available online at <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf>.

O'Toole, M.E. (2000). *The school shooter: A threat assessment perspective*. Quantico, VA: National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

For Additional Resources:

See Selected Threat Assessment Resources, January, 2011.

For samples of threat assessment documentation forms, consultation or technical assistance, please contact the Colorado School Safety Resource Center, Department of Public Safety.



IV. Threat Assessment Inquiry: A Summary of the Secret Service Eleven Key Questions

How should the information from a threat assessment inquiry be organized and analyzed? Information from research and interviews conducted during a threat assessment inquiry can be guided by the following 11 key questions:

1. WHAT ARE THE STUDENT'S MOTIVES AND GOALS?
2. HAVE THERE BEEN ANY COMMUNICATIONS SUGGESTING IDEAS OR INTENT TO ATTACK?
3. HAS THE SUBJECT SHOWN INAPPROPRIATE INTEREST IN SCHOOL ATTACKS OR ATTACKERS, WEAPONS, INCIDENTS OF MASS VIOLENCE?
4. HAS THE STUDENT ENGAGED IN ATTACK RELATED BEHAVIORS?
5. DOES THE STUDENT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO CARRY OUT THE ACT?
6. IS THE STUDENT EXPERIENCING HOPELESSNESS, DESPERATION OR DESPAIR?
7. DOES THE STUDENT HAVE A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP WITH AT LEAST ONE RESPONSIBLE ADULT?
8. DOES THE STUDENT SEE VIOLENCE AS AN ACCEPTABLE OR DESIRABLE WAY TO SOLVE PROBLEMS?
9. IS THE STUDENT'S CONVERSATION AND "STORY" CONSISTENT WITH THEIR ACTIONS?
10. ARE OTHER PEOPLE CONCERNED ABOUT THE STUDENT'S POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE?
11. WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES MIGHT AFFECT THE LIKELIHOOD OF VIOLENCE?

Use the information gathered to help determine the seriousness of the concern and to develop the action and support plan.

Explanation of the Secret Service Eleven Key Questions

1. **WHAT ARE THE STUDENT'S MOTIVE(S) AND GOALS?**
 - a. What motivated the student to make the statements or take the actions that caused him or her to come to attention?
 - b. Does the situation or circumstance that led to these statements or actions still exist?
 - c. Does the student have a major grievance or grudge? Against whom?
 - d. What efforts have been made to resolve the problem and what has been the result? Does the potential attacker feel that any part of the problem is resolved or see any alternative?
2. **HAVE THERE BEEN ANY COMMUNICATIONS SUGGESTING IDEAS OR INTENT TO ATTACK?**
 - a. What, if anything, has the student communicated to someone else (targets, friends, other students, teachers, family, others) or written in a diary, journal, or website concerning his or her ideas and/or intentions?
3. **HAS THE SUBJECT SHOWN INAPPROPRIATE INTEREST IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?**
 - a. School attacks or attackers;
 - b. Weapons (including recent acquisition of any relevant weapon);
 - c. Incidents of mass violence (terrorism, workplace violence, mass murderers).
4. **HAS THE STUDENT ENGAGED IN ATTACK-RELATED BEHAVIORS? THESE BEHAVIORS MIGHT INCLUDE:**
 - a. Developing an attack idea or plan;
 - b. Making efforts to acquire or practice with weapons;
 - c. casing or checking out possible sites and areas for attack;
 - d. Rehearsing attacks or ambushes.



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5. DOES THE STUDENT HAVE THE *CAPACITY* TO CARRY OUT AN ACT OF TARGETED VIOLENCE?

- a. How organized is the student's thinking and behavior?
- b. Does the student have the means, e.g., access to a weapon, to carry out an attack?

6. IS THE STUDENT EXPERIENCING HOPELESSNESS, DESPERATION AND/OR DESPAIR?

- a. Is there information to suggest that the student is experiencing desperation and/or despair?
- b. Has the student experienced a recent failure, loss and/or loss of status?
- c. Is the student known to be having difficulty coping with a stressful event/
- d. Is the student now, or has the student ever been, suicidal or "accident-prone"?
- e. Has the student engaged in behavior that suggests that he or she has considered ending their life?

7. DOES THE STUDENT HAVE A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP WITH AT LEAST ONE RESPONSIBLE ADULT?

- a. Does this student have at least one relationship with an adult where the student feels that he or she can confide in the adult and believes that the adult will listen without judging or jumping to conclusions? (Students with trusting relationships with adults may be direct away from violence and despair and toward hope.)
- b. Is the student emotionally connected to – or disconnected from – other student?
- c. Has the student previously come to someone's attention or raised concern in a way that suggested he or she need intervention or supportive services?

8. DOES THE STUDENT SEE VIOLENCE AS AN ACCEPTABLE – OR DESIRABLE – OR THE ONLY WAY TO SOLVE PROBLEMS?

- a. Does the setting around the student (friends, fellow students, parents, teachers, adults) explicitly or implicitly support or endorse violence as a way of resolving problems or disputes?
- b. Has the student been "dared" by others to engage in an act of violence?

9. IS THE STUDENT'S CONVERSATION AND "STORY" CONSISTENT WITH HIS OR HER ACTIONS?

- a. Does information from collateral interviews and from the student's own behavior confirm or dispute what the student says is going on?

10. ARE OTHER PEOPLE CONCERNED ABOUT THE STUDENT'S POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE?

- a. Are those who know the student concerned that he or she might take action based on violent ideas or plans?
- b. Are those who know the student concerned about a specific target?
- c. Have those who know the student witnessed recent changes or escalations in mood and behavior?

11. WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES MIGHT AFFECT THE LIKELIHOOD OF AN ATTACK?

- a. What factors in the student's life and/or environment might increase or decrease the likelihood that the student will attempt to mount an attack at school?
- b. What is the response of other persons who know about the student's ideas or plan to mount an attack? (Do those who know about the student's ideas actively discourage the student from acting violently, encourage the student to attack, deny the possibility of violence, passively collude with attack, etc.?)

Adapted from: Fein, R., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2002). *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools Program and U.S. Secret Service, National Threat Assessment Center. A complete copy of the guide is available online at <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/threatassessmentguide.pdf>.



V. Selected Threat Assessment Resources November 2011

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Schneller, J. (2005). Psychosocial evaluation and threat risk assessment. Lutz, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R. A., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). The final report and findings of the safe school initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education.

Access the report in its entirety at

<http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf>.

Additional Related Resources

Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence: Information Students Learn May Prevent A Targeted Attack. This study aimed to further prevent attacks by exploring how students with prior knowledge of attacks made decisions regarding what steps, if any, to take after learning the information. The study sought to identify what might be done to encourage more students to share information they learn about potential targeted school-based violence with one or more adults. The report is accessible at http://rems.ed.gov/index.php?page=publications_General.

Campus Attacks: Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education, developed by the U.S. Secret Service (USS), the U.S. Department of Education (ED), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) explores the issue of violence at institutions of higher education (IHEs) in response to the tragic shooting at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University ("Virginia Tech") on April 16, 2007. ED/USS/FBI initiated a collaborative effort to understand the nature of this violence and identify ways of preventing future attacks that would affect our nation's colleges and universities. In total, 272 incidents were identified through a comprehensive search of more than 115,000 results in open-source reporting from 1900 to 2008. The findings are pertinent and far-reaching, and the incidents studied include all forms of targeted violence, ranging from domestic violence to serial killers. The report is available electronically on the REMS TA Center Web site at http://rems.ed.gov/docs/CampusAttacks_201004.pdf.

In November 2009, Virginia Tech published an additional resource document on threat assessment. This document, ***Implementing Behavioral Threat Assessment on Campus***, was produced by Virginia Tech with the support of a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. In this publication, Virginia Tech documented their experience in developing and implementing a behavioral threat assessment process in the time following the campus shootings on April 16, 2007. Starting a campus behavioral threat assessment process included creating a multi-disciplinary threat assessment team; strengthening and developing necessary policies and procedures to enhance and support the team's efforts; training the team; identifying and harnessing key resources on and off campus to intervene where necessary; securing case management personnel to implement and monitor intervention efforts; and raising awareness on campus regarding the team's existence, its purpose, and the role that everyone on campus shares in reporting troubling behavior to the team. The report and numerous resources collected during the course of developing this book can serve as a starting point for institutions to consider in crafting their own policies, mission statement, public awareness message, and other relevant materials. Accessible at http://rems.ed.gov/index.php?page=resources_Additional§ion=2

The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Secret Service have developed an interactive CD-ROM that includes scenarios to be used by school threat assessment teams. The CD-ROM, "Safe School and Threat Assessment Experience: Scenarios Exploring the Findings of the Safe School Initiative" is available



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from the Department of Education's Publication Center (ED Pubs) at www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html or by calling (toll free) 1-877-433-7827 or by emailing edpubs@inet.ed.gov. The publication ID is - ED002738C.

The National Association of School Psychologists provides a succinct one-page fact sheet that includes an overview of the Secret Service and FBI findings, a list of policies that should be addressed district-wide, information on building an interdisciplinary team, and threat types and levels of risk. Access the Fact Sheet, *Threat Assessments: Predicting and Preventing School Violence*, online at http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/threatassess_fs.aspx.

