

Advanced Threat Assessment for School Psychologists

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Michigan Association of School Psychologists
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Learning Objectives

- Review critical foundations, strategies, and resources needed to establish and implement an effective, legally defensive threat assessment and management process
- Identify methods for conducting threat assessment using strategies that increase equity while decreasing bias and disproportionality
- Describe the distinction and complementary aspects between threat assessment and special education policy and procedures
- Analyze prior cases and identify “lessons learned” in order to improve threat assessment and management practices

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Survey:

What best defines your current, primary role?

- School-based practitioner
- School or district leadership (coordinator, director, etc.)
- Graduate student
- Graduate educator
- State employee
- Private practice/contract work
- Other



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NASP Practice Model: Domain 6

Services to Promote Safe and Supportive Schools

School psychologists, in collaboration with other professionals, engage in crisis intervention, conduct comprehensive suicide and/or **threat assessments** for students who are identified as at risk, and design interventions to address mental and behavioral health needs.



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Presentation Outline

1. Understanding School Violence: Implications for Practice
2. Foundations of Effective Threat Assessment and Management
3. Addressing Disproportionality and Bias
4. Threat Assessment and Special Education
5. Case Studies and Lessons Learned

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Survey

- How many have attended the full day basic training offered through Michigan Police Statewide Project?
- How many have attended a training consistent with the Michigan Police Statewide Project?
- How many have attended other threat assessment trainings (MASP, NASP, other trainings)?



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Understanding School Violence: Implications for Practice

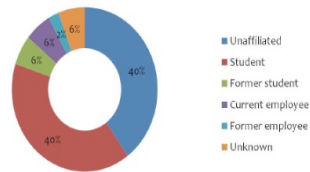
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Understanding School Violence

Homicide and Suicide at School

- Most school-associated student homicides involve a firearm and a single victim and offender.
- In 80% of school-associated firearm-related homicides and suicides, weapons used were obtained from home or from a friend or relative.

Shooter's Relationship to School

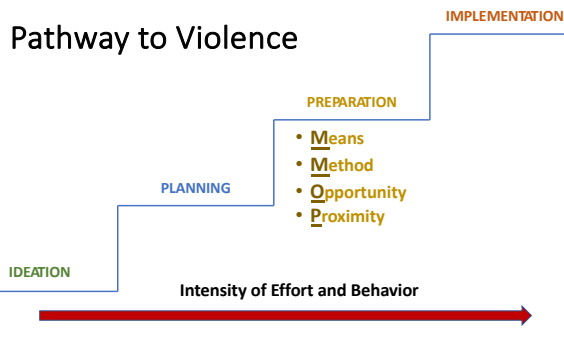


Brink, S. E., Nickerson, A., & Serwacki, M. (2013, February). Youth gun violence fact sheet. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists. Retrieved from <https://www.nasponline.org/advocacy/youth-gun-violence>

Joint Regional Intelligence Center (August 20, 2013). US School Shootings: Five Year Analysis.

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Pathway to Violence



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U.S. Secret Service, FBI Key Findings:		
Key Finding	Implications for Schools	Implications for Assessment
#1. There is no accurate profile of a school shooter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Profiling" is not effective • Attend to and address tendencies toward stereotypes and bias 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat all threats and threatening behavior similarly • Gather information from a variety of sources • Focus on behavior not appearances, disability status, background, etc.
#2. Many attackers felt bullied or persecuted by others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement bullying prevention and response protocols • Actively address school climate and culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine if there is a history of bullying or harassment (victim, perpetrator, or both) • Inquire about perceptions of bullying, exclusion, or persecution
#3. Most demonstrated difficulty coping with loss and personal failure. Many were suicidal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement universal screening procedures; identify students for intervention/referral • Review suicide prevention and intervention programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate for depression, hopelessness, despair • Evaluate for suicide risk • Assess for coping skills, problem-solving skills, forward thinking, and identified supports • Identify situational "triggers"
#4. Most attacks were pre-planned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend to and intervene when behaviors and communication that may indicate a pathway to violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider behavioral histories and tendencies • Gather information from multiple sources • Monitor concerns over time

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U.S. Secret Service, FBI Key Findings (cont.):		
Key Finding	Implications for Schools	Implications for Assessment
#5. Most communicated their plans and ideas to others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train students, teachers, and community members how and when to report • Create a culture of trust and establish multiple methods for reporting • Consider ways to monitor activity on school systems/devices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather information from a variety of sources (interviews, record reviews, written/artistic material, social media) • Emphasize the importance of student/staff relationships
#6. Most attackers did not directly threaten their targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend to behaviors, not just verbal and written communication • Train students and teachers to report concerning behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize preventative, proactive strategies for responding to concerning behaviors • Gather information from a variety of sources
#7. Most demonstrated behaviors that were concerning to others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train teachers and adults to report and respond to concerning behaviors • Establish a "communication vortex" to centralize information • Implement intervention protocols • Monitor, monitor, monitor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend to and evaluate historical information • Emphasize interventions, progress monitoring, and fidelity of implementation

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U.S. Secret Service, FBI Key Findings (cont.):		
Key Finding	Implications for Schools	Implications for Assessment
#8. Most were assisted or encouraged in some capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess school climate and promote a positive school culture • Train students and community members how/when to report concerns • Be intentional about developing relationships with students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather information from others who may have knowledge of the student's behavior • Inquire about others' influence and involvement • Consider the role of social media
#9. Most had access to and experience with weapons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify protocols for initiating searches on campus • Establish protocols with law enforcement for initiating searches off campus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be vigilant when inquiring about access to weapons • Interview and involve parents in assessment and safety planning • Assume access is possible
#10. Most were stopped by means other than law enforcement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate school safety activities with law enforcement • Attend to best practice guidance when training students and staff in emergency procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement suicide risk assessment protocols

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Implications for Intervention:

Considerations for School Psychologists

1. **Emphasize the importance of school culture. Create a supportive, inclusive school culture**
 - Opportunities for non-contingent relationship development
 - Establish trust among students and staff (work the halls)
2. **Explicitly teach and reinforce interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, and coping strategies**
 - Emotional and behavioral regulation skills
 - Social skills
 - Relationship skills
 - Conflict resolution skills
3. **Establish bullying response protocols**
 - Respond consistently to student reports and complaints
4. **Screen and monitor for depression and suicide risk**
 - Universal screening; monitoring of student risk
 - Implement suicide assessment/risk protocols with fidelity
5. **Establish collaborative partnerships with school mental health teams and community partners**

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Big Ideas:

- Prevention is possible
 - Information about ideas and plans can be discovered through observable behaviors
- Respond quickly and thoroughly
- Information may be scattered and fragmented
- Adopt a problem-solving framework and an inquisitive mindset
- Treat as a process, not an event
- Emphasize collaboration, intervention and support



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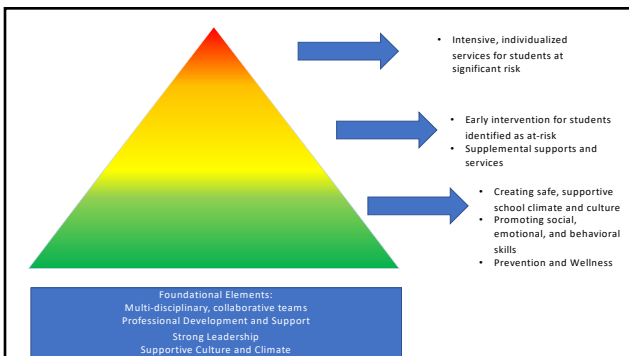
Foundations of Effective Threat Assessment and Management

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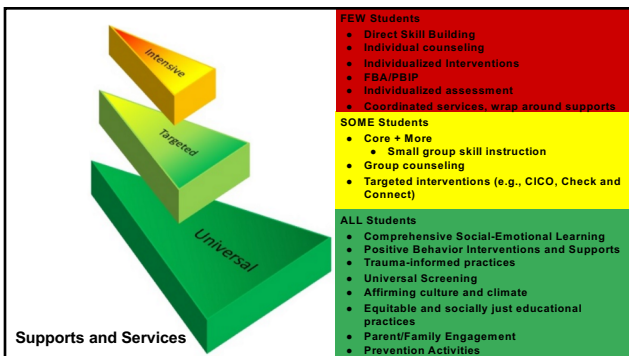
Effective Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management is:

- ✓ One component of a comprehensive school safety plan
- ✓ Informed by research and best practice
- ✓ Multi-disciplinary
- ✓ A process (not an event)
- ✓ Focused on intervention (not discipline)
- ✓ Integrated with other policies and procedures
- ✓ Timely
- ✓ Responsive
- ✓ Reflective

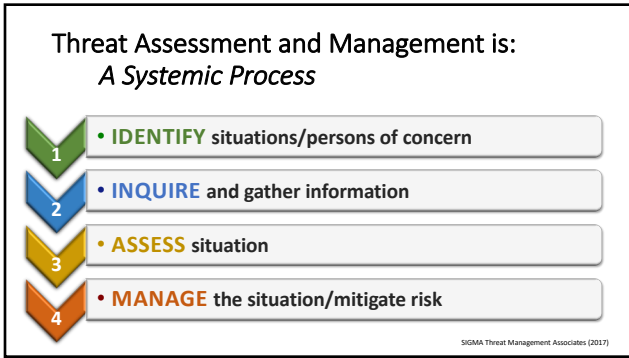
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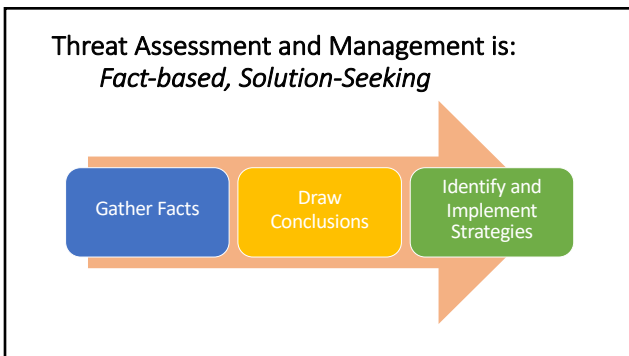
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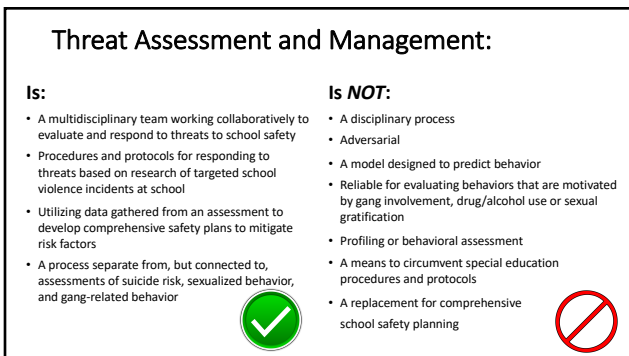
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Inquiry vs. Investigation

- **Inquiry** → initiated when information about a student’s behavior and communications passes an agreed-upon threshold of concern.
 - Conducted by a multi-disciplinary school team
- **Investigation** → initiated when a potential threat is serious/imminent
 - Conducted by police with school involvement to provide information

*The central question in a threat assessment inquiry or investigation is whether a student **poses** a threat, not whether the student has **made** a threat.”*

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A Colorado School Suspended A 12-Year-Old Black Boy And Called The Police To His Home After He "Waved" A Toy Gun During A Virtual Class

By Rowell Watkins, Associated Press Staff - Published October 03, 2020
Updated December 2, 2020 at 3:49 pm

In a statement, a spokesperson for Community ISD said it is, "Unapologetic about our commitment to take appropriate legal measures to ensure the safety of our students, staff and visitors. If any person is found to have **made** a threat of violence against a student, staff member or school building, he or she will be arrested and charged to the full extent that the law allows. The district is also committed to actively cooperating with members of the legal and/or juvenile justice system throughout the adjudication process which would arise from such an arrest."

Ellie Hall
GuzzFeed News Reporter
Posted on September 6, 2020, at 7:29 p.m. ET

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Building an Effective Process:

- Step 1: Establish a multidisciplinary team
- Step 2: Define prohibited and concerning behaviors
- Step 3: Create a central reporting mechanism
- Step 4: Define threshold for law enforcement intervention
- Step 5: Establish threat assessment procedures
- Step 6: Develop risk management options
- Step 7: Create and promote safe school climates
- Step 8: Provide training



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Step	Implications for Schools	Implications for School Psychologists
#1. Establish a Multi-Disciplinary Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a consistent, multi-disciplinary team including: administration, school-employed mental health professional(s), and law enforcement Designate a team leader Include others as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for representation on the team, coordination and communication amongst team members, and regular training for the team
#2. Define prohibited, concerning behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish policy/procedures for responding to behaviors including: engaging in violent behavior, threatening violent behavior, weapon possession, bullying/harassment Establish procedures for screening and assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with other school leaders to establish protocols for intervention and referrals to community agencies Determine who will be responsible for gathering information to inform decision making
#3. Establish and promote a central reporting mechanism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish one or more methods for reporting Ensure ability to respond Provide training for how/when to report Provide options for anonymous reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider implications for culturally responsive practices Promote family engagement and community collaboration
#4. Determine Threshold for LEO Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify behaviors that are managed by school team Consult with SROs/LEOs to determine when/how law enforcement will be involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote best practices in school discipline and school safety Advocate for best practices when involving law enforcement


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Step	Implications for Schools	Implications for School Psychologists
#5. Establish Threat Assessment Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine how cases will be documented and how responsibilities will be delegated Establish procedures for screening reports (who, what information, etc.) Determine how information will be gathered and by whom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist with gathering information (record review and interviews) Focus on behavior and observable actions Attend to implementation fidelity Focus team on the 11 key questions Build rapport.
#6. Develop Intervention Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify a continuum of resources within the school and district Identify resources within the community; establish community partnerships Identify resources available remotely Identify and attend to gaps in interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend to appropriateness of intervention options (developmental considerations, cultural appropriateness, contextual fit) Emphasize best practices in selecting, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating interventions Promote equity and strength-based strategies
#7. Create and Promote Safe School Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administer surveys (students, parents, staff) Share and respond to results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote data-based decision-making Emphasize strategies for equitable family/student engagement
#8. Provide Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide comprehensive, discipline-specific training for teachers and other school staff Collaborate with law enforcement Train students, staff, community in when/how to report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for advanced training for school mental health staff Attend to efficacy and frequency of training Provide periodic, supplemental training

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Big Ideas:

- School psychologists have the comprehensive training and expertise to serve as leaders in school safety and threat assessment activities
 - Data-based decision making
 - Consultation and collaboration
 - Systems-level prevention
 - Mental and behavioral health
 - Culturally-responsive practices
 - Intervention implementation
 - Home, school, and community collaboration
- Supportive, effective systems and an adequate workforce are critical to school psychologists' ability to engage in these practices



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Addressing Disproportionality and Bias in the Threat Assessment Process

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Key Research Findings:

- Students with disabilities are over-represented in the number of threat assessments completed and in the number of threat assessments classified as severe
 - **AND**...students with certain disabilities are more likely to demonstrate poor impulse control, low frustration tolerance, aggressive behaviors, and poor coping skills
- Black, Hispanic, and Native American males are over-represented in the number of assessments completed
 - **AND**...these groups are also over-represented in disciplinary referrals, suspension and expulsions, and law enforcement referrals suggesting bias may influence referrals and interactions with minoritized students
- Studies suggest that cultural competence and bias is not often considered when developing threat assessment protocols and building multi-disciplinary teams
- Well-executed threat assessment is more likely to result in interventions (counseling and parent conference) than exclusionary discipline
 - **AND**...when not conducted appropriately there is risk for disproportionate application of consequences

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Big Ideas:

- Approach threat assessment using a culturally-responsive lens
- Collect, analyze and act on data indicating disproportionality in referrals, disciplinary action, and law enforcement involvement
- Provide training for teams specific to:
 - Diversity
 - Equity
 - Privilege
 - Implicit, explicit and confirmatory bias
- Separate threat assessment from disciplinary activities
- Emphasize problem-solving models



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Intersectionality

- The merging or intersection of multiple marginalized identities
- Impacts individuals who identify as members of historically oppressed groups (e.g., African American, Latinx, LGBTQ, women, individuals with disabilities)
 - Holding one of these identities often results in facing discrimination.
 - Holding more than one of these identities creates an intersection and increases the likelihood of discrimination and oppression
- Such experiences are distinct and often more intense than those related to a single marginalized identity

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Understanding Intersectionality

Who experiences the impact of intersectionality?
Individuals who identify as members of historically oppressed groups

* This list is not exhaustive, but only serves as an example of marginalized identity groups.

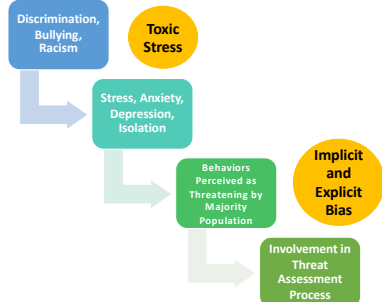
What does intersectionality look like?
An individual who identifies as a member of multiple historically marginalized groups.

Jane is a White youth with a hearing disability who is eligible for free and reduced lunch services due to a family income below the poverty line.

Ahmed is a Muslim youth of refugee status who identifies as gay.

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Implications for Threat Assessment



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Implications for Threat Assessment (cont.)

For students experiencing intersectionality:

- More likely to have experienced exclusionary discipline
- Less likely to trust the team and the process
- Less likely to experience interventions as supportive and helpful

For threat assessment teams:

- Consider student’s historical experiences, including those in the school community
- Approach situations through a culturally competent lens
- Select culturally responsive interventions
- Establish trusting relationships with students and families

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Types of Bias	
Implicit Bias	Attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Exist in our subconscious and cause feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearances
Explicit Bias	Attitudes and beliefs we have about a person or group on a conscious level
Confirmation Bias	Tendency to look for evidence or interpret information in a way that confirms a preconceived opinion; Noticing facts that support beliefs and ignore those that do not
Availability Bias	Tendency to assign importance to behaviors and observations that immediately come to mind
Hindsight Bias	After an event, the tendency to see the event as more predictable than it really was (leads to blame or belief that event could have been predicted) Overgeneralizing outcomes from previous cases to new ones
Illusion Memory	Believe that we remember more than we actually do A memory or event becomes distorted and the person will then remember something that never actually happened in order to fill any gaps; report of a past event seriously deviates from the event’s actual occurrence.
Perceptual Bias	Failure to recognize an <u>unexpected</u> stimulus that is in plain sight; Unwillingness to challenge one’s own perceptions

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Implications for School Psychologists

- ✓ Emphasize approaching situations non-judgmentally
- ✓ Focus on facts and observable behaviors
- ✓ Documentation is critical – timeliness, thoroughness, accuracy
- ✓ Attend to personal biases
- ✓ Intentionally address situations where biases may impact team’s thinking, interpretations, and decision-making

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Threat Assessment and Special Education

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THREAT ASSESSMENT	SPECIAL EDUCATION
Goal is ensuring health and safety of all involved (school community, subject, and potential targets)	Goal is meeting individual needs related to suspected or existing disability
Considers needs of all students involved	Consider needs of individual student only
Multidisciplinary team of professionals who have received specialized threat assessment training	Multidisciplinary team of educational professionals and parents
Assesses if the student legitimately poses a threat	Makes the determination if a student has a disability and qualifies for special education services and what services are needed to ensure FAPE
Parent consent is not required, but parent participation in interviews and intervention planning is highly recommended and should be solicited	Parent consent/participation is required
Decisions can inform special education programming, but a threat assessment does not replace or override IEP processes and procedures	Decisions are legally binding as part of the IEP

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[Additional info regarding BTAM and SpEd: https://www.nassonline.org/btam-sped](https://www.nassonline.org/btam-sped)

Threat Assessment and IDEA Regulations

Safeguards to ensure special education procedures are followed:

- Consider the need for functional behavioral assessment/behavior plan to establish necessary supports
- Follow procedures for changes in placement or programming
- Follow procedures for disciplinary removals
 - Manifestation determination reviews (MDRs)
 - Interim alternative educational placement (45 day rule)
- Ensure parent involvement, notification, consent for changes in placement or programming
- Separate threat assessment process from IDEA/IEP process
- Attend to student's access to FAPE and opportunity to make appropriate progress on IEP goals
- Balance student's rights with safety of school community

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Threat Assessments are NOT Manifestation Determination Reviews

Manifestation Determination	Threat Assessment
Focus on the student's disability and special education needs and services as they relate to a single incident or pattern of behavior	Focus on the student's patterns of dangerous behaviors
Determines whether or not a student's behavior was a manifestation of the student's identified area of disability	Determines the level of concern regarding a student's overall pattern of behavior and if the student poses a threat to school safety
May lead to changes in service/placement or to expulsion hearing	Focus on disrupting the pathway to violence and may lead to identification of needed interventions or supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May lead to recommendations to the IEP team

Karan & Lee (2005)

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Threat Assessments are NOT Expulsion Hearings

Expulsion Hearing	Threat Assessments
Determines whether or not a specific behavior violated school policy	Assess levels of concern regarding a student's pattern of behavior over time
Determines whether or not a student should be expelled	Leads to preventative planning for safety in a specific placement to reduce risk
<p>**Note that requirements under IDEA do not end with expulsion.</p>	

Karan & Lee (2005)

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Implications for School Psychologists


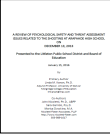

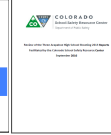
- Likely the member of the team with the most knowledge about disabilities
- Likely the member of the threat assessment team with the most knowledge of special education law, procedures, and procedural safeguards
 - May serve as the liaison to the IEP team
- Attend to decisions that may impact a student's access to FAPE
- Alert team members to potential needs related to Child Find for non-identified students

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Case Studies and Lessons Learned

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ARAPAHOE HIGH SCHOOL Post Incident Reports







Reports published January 2016; Review by CCSRC September 2016
Review of reports conducted by Dr. Melissa Reeves, Ph.D., NCSP

Note: this is not an all-exhaustive review but summarizes specific key findings

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University of Colorado Report Key Findings



Information Sharing - Failure to:

- Use the student information system to document behavioral and safety concerns
 - *Communication vortex*
- Train students and staff in an anonymous reporting system
- Implement an Interagency Information Sharing Agreement with law enforcement and community agencies

Threat Assessment Process - Failure to:

- Thoroughly complete threat assessment instrument
- Conduct staff-wide training
- Engage in adequate follow-up and monitoring of safety plan

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Kanan & Nicoletti Report Key Findings



Failure to...

- Identify a district safety team to coordinate safety efforts
- Require and adequately train staff
- Train in systematic reporting
- Identify a clear district threat assessment process
- Understand FERPA
- Effectively communicate and document concerns
- Conduct personal interviews with student and parents outside of meeting processes
- Implement an intervention, monitoring, follow-up/review plan
- Effectively include SRO in threat assessment process and follow-up

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Safe Havens International Report Key Findings



Threat Assessment Process - Failure to:

- Use a systematic and "integrated systems approach"
- Focus on if the student **posed** a threat
- Clearly identify threat assessment team and leader
- Explain conclusions reached
- Take appropriate discipline/legal actions after the student made direct threats to kill librarian/debate coach
- Request access to mental health records

Physical Safety Measures: Failures:

- Exterior door left unsecured
- Lack of proper supervision
- School security camera had dirty lenses, different time stamps
- Confusion between lockdown and lockout
- Family reunification site too close to site of incident

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Summary: Commonalities in Reports

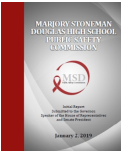
- Process not implemented thoroughly and with fidelity
- Lack of:
 - Clearly identified multidisciplinary assessment team with identified team leader
 - Thorough data collection and documentation
 - Comprehensive, consistent training for staff
 - Training for students/staff in reporting procedures
 - Vortex of information
 - Involvement of SRO
 - Understanding of FERPA
 - Interagency agreements
 - Intervention, support, and follow-up after initial threat assessment and safety plan

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Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School
Key Findings

Background Information

- Mandated procedures in place since 2002
- 3 stage assessment process
 1. initial response
 2. Level 1: screening
 3. Level 2: in-depth assessment
- Team composition
 - School administrators
 - Teacher
 - Counselors
 - Mental health professional
 - Law enforcement
- Team members required to receive training
- All forms on paper



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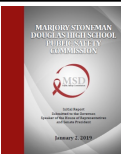
Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School
Key Findings

Incident Details

- Threat assessment completed on 9/28/2016
 - Included two AP's
 - Level 1 assessment initiated
 - Transitioned to Level 2 (reasons why are unclear)
- Prohibited from bringing backpack to school
- Unclear if findings were shared with mental health
- Follow-up unclear

Findings

- Threat assessment process was mishandled by AP
- Principal was disengaged
 - Failed to establish reporting and notification procedures
- Instrument is comprehensive – implementation is flawed
- Lack of training
- Process is reactive, decentralized, school-based with little to no oversight and accountability



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Implications for Threat Assessment Teams

- ✓ Clearly articulate process and implement with fidelity
- ✓ Thorough data collection is critical
- ✓ Checklists are a guide, but should not drive decisions
- ✓ All concerns must be taken seriously
- ✓ Create systems to document and share concerns
- ✓ Understand FERPA exceptions and use them
- ✓ Train (and retrain) ALL staff and students in early warning signs and reporting
- ✓ Provide high quality threat assessment training
- ✓ Intervention, supervision/monitoring plans MUST be developed and implemented with fidelity
- ✓ Request releases to exchange information with community-based providers

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Questions?

Let's Connect!

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