

Ohio School Behavioral Threat Assessment Model Policy and Protocol

A Guide for School Personnel and Law Enforcement Officers

Ohio School Safety Center Ohio Department of Public Safety

DISCLAIMER

This document does not constitute either an informal or formal opinion of the Ohio Attorney General, Ohio Department of Education, or Ohio Department of Public Safety. It does not constitute legal advice or counsel. It does not create an attorney-client relationship. It creates no rights beyond those established under the constitutions, statutes, regulations and administrative rules of the United States and the State of Ohio. It does not attempt to provide answers to every question that may arise regarding school safety.

This document reflects the law as of the date of its publication. It may be superseded or affected by other versions or changes in the law.

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Table of Contents

Introduction 6

Overview 7

 Background 7

 Scope 7

 Definitions 8

 Information Sharing/Consent..... 10

Ohio School Threat Assessment Model Protocols 16

 Phase I: Initial Response and Information Gathering 17

 Considerations for Information Gathering 18

 The Importance of Rapport Building 18

 Risk Classification Level..... 19

 Phase II: Additional Information Gathering and Risk Classification 22

 Phase III: Intervention and Case Management 22

References 26

This guide includes a basic introduction to behavioral threat assessment, model protocols, as well as charts to assist in determining the risk levels of behaviors and actions. Additional resources are available through the Ohio School Safety Center, Ohio Department of Education, and Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Introduction

On August 21, 2019, Governor Mike DeWine signed Executive Order 2019-21D creating the Ohio School Safety Center within the Ohio Department of Public Safety. The Ohio School Safety Center is responsible for assisting local schools and law enforcement with preventing, preparing for, and responding to threats and acts of violence, including self-harm, through a holistic, solutions-based approach to improving school safety.

The Ohio 133rd General Assembly passed House Bill 123 titled “Safety and Violence Education Students Act,” or the “SAVE Students Act” with an effective date of March 24, 2021. The SAVE Students Act requires the Ohio Department of Public Safety, in consultation with the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Attorney General, to develop a model school behavioral threat assessment plan to provide best practice guidance to schools around the state. The Ohio School Behavioral Threat Assessment is a significant part of that guidance. This protocol was developed to assist school safety professionals in identifying students of concern so that their behaviors can be mitigated to the point that they no longer pose a threat.

This guide focuses on one of the most important school violence prevention tools, the school-based threat assessment. School Behavioral Threat Assessment should be applied as an early intervention tool. A well-designed threat assessment protocol should help improve school safety and identify students that need additional resources.

Any documents mentioned in this guide may be requested from an OSSC regional liaison or directly from the OSSC by emailing ohioschoolsafetycenter@dps.ohio.gov.

Overview

Background

House Bill (HB) 123 (Ohio), the Safety and Violence Education Students (SAVE Students) Act, was enacted on March 24, 2021. HB 123 calls for a comprehensive approach to school safety involving the Ohio departments of Education, Public Safety, Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Attorney General's Office. Section 3313.669 (A) requires each local, city, exempted village, and joint vocational school district to create a threat assessment team for each school building in the district serving grades six through 12. It also requires each member of the threat assessment team to complete an approved threat assessment training program, from the list maintained by the Ohio School Safety Center, upon appointment and once every three years thereafter.

Scope

In Ohio schools, behavioral threat assessment teams function to conduct assessments and interventions for individuals whose behavior indicates they may pose a risk of harm to the school community and/or themselves.

Multidisciplinary Decision Making

There should not be any attempt to complete the threat assessment process in isolation. At least two team members representing different disciplines (e.g., administrators, school psychologists, teachers, counselors, school resource officers). need to be involved in the decision-making process. Team members should be well versed in the threat assessment process, applicable policy, and law. When a threat assessment team is uncertain how to proceed in a situation, they are encouraged to consult with nearby schools, local law enforcement or the Ohio School Safety Center Regional Liaisons. Any consultation with outside resources should be documented.

Individuals potentially subject to a behavioral threat assessment include:

- Students: current, former, and prospective
- Employees: current, former, and prospective
- Parents/guardians of students/non-custodial parents or relatives
- Persons who are (or have been) in a relationship with faculty, staff, or students
- Contractors, vendors, or other visitors
- Unaffiliated persons

Ohio schools will utilize a behavioral threat assessment model and Behavioral Threat Assessment Management Team to assist in the proactive prevention of targeted violence by identifying areas of concern, gathering information, assessing the likelihood of violence, initiating appropriate interventions and violence mitigation strategies and provide ongoing evaluation to increase positive outcomes for individuals and enhance overall school safety. Individuals who plan to commit violent acts against schools often share their plans with someone. This is an important realization when discussing intervention points.

Ohio schools will utilize a behavior-based approach to identify and assess individuals who demonstrate concerning communications or behavior and does not tolerate profiling of any kind based on race, ethnicity, age, physical or mental health conditions, learning abilities, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation or religion.

Definitions

- **Behavioral Threat Assessment:** In K-12 schools, a *behavioral threat assessment* is a proactive approach to identify, assess, and provide appropriate interventions and resources for students who display a behavior that elicits concern for the safety of themselves or others.

A behavioral threat assessment:

✓ Focuses on behaviors, not traits or profiles	✗ <i>Is not</i> a criminal investigation
✓ Involves multidisciplinary school staff	✗ <i>Is not</i> a disciplinary process
✓ Identifies threatening and other concerning behaviors, and assesses them in context	✗ <i>Does not</i> involve zero tolerance
✓ Provides students with additional supports	✗ <i>Does not</i> replace student support programs
✓ Utilizes existing school resources	✗ <i>Is not</i> a physical security measure
✓ Promotes a safe school climate	

- **Bullying:** The Ohio Revised Code defines, harassment, intimidation or bullying as follows¹:
 - Any intentional written, verbal, graphic, or physical act that a student or group of students exhibited toward other particular student more than once and the behavior both:
 - Causes mental or physical harm to the other student; and
 - Is sufficiently severe, persistent or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening or abusive educational environment for the other student
 - Violence within a dating relationship.
- **Electronic act:** An act committed through the use of a cellular telephone, computer, pager, personal communication device, or other electronic communication device.²
- **Concerning Behavior:** An observable behavior that elicits concerns in bystanders regarding the safety of an individual or those around them. Some concerning behaviors may be defined as *prohibited behaviors* and should trigger an immediate response. Prohibited behaviors can include threats, weapons violations, and other aggressive or violent behavior. Other behaviors that may elicit concern can include unusual interests in violent topics, conflicts between classmates, increased anger, increased substance use, or other noteworthy

¹ [Section 3313.666 - Ohio Revised Code | Ohio Laws](#)

² Definition adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

changes in behavior (e.g., depression or withdrawal from social activities). *Note: Concerning behavior does not necessarily imply or predict that an individual or group will become violent. Instead, it serves as an indicator that the student may be in need of intervention or increased supports. Proactive intervention and de-escalation are key and should be part of any approach to violence prevention.*

- **Concerning Communication:** Unusual, bizarre, threatening, or violent communications made by an individual or group. Concerning communications may allude to violent intentions, violence to solve a problem, justifying violent acts, unusual interest in weapons, personal grievances, or other inappropriate interests. Concerning communications may also allude to hopelessness or suicide. Concerning communications may be made in the form of written, oral, or visual media. *Note: Concerning communication does not necessarily imply or predict that an individual or group will become violent. Instead, it serves as an indicator that the student may be in need of intervention or increased supports. Proactive intervention and de-escalation are key and should be part of any approach to violence prevention.*
- **Multidisciplinary Behavioral Threat Assessment Team:** A team composed of highly trained school personnel with diverse positions, backgrounds, and experience (e.g., administrators, school psychologists, teachers, counselors, school resource officers). The team will receive reports about concerning student behavior and situations, gather additional information, assess the risk posed to the community, and develop and implement intervention and management strategies to mitigate any risk of harm.³
- **Targeted violence:** A premeditated act of violence directed at an individual, group, or location for a specific reason.

³ National Threat Assessment Center, 2018, p. 7

Information Sharing/Consent

Although the law gives schools⁴, law enforcement, and child welfare professionals the ability to interview a child without parental consent, it is considered best practice to have the consent and cooperation of the parents. ***A positive and communicative relationship with the parents can be a mitigating factor and make a child's reintegration back into the school community after a significant incident easier to manage.***

When investigating a safety issue, schools do not need to request consent from parents prior to interviewing their child. However, it is possible that parents might later refuse the school permission to complete the behavioral threat assessment with their child, to speak to administration, or allow access to their child. It is certainly the parent's right to refuse, but (depending on the seriousness of the prohibited/concerning behavior) could significantly increase the risk level associated with the threat. The reason behind this concern is that it could indicate that the parent doesn't recognize serious pathological behavior.

Schools may search school provided property such as lockers, iPads, and laptops without permission. Schools may also be able to search the personal belongings of a student, such as a jacket or backpack but must first have reasonable suspicion to do so. This reasonable suspicion may include information that has been shared about but not limited to illegal drugs, paraphernalia, and weapons.

If a school is unable to complete a threat assessment because of consent issues or limited access to a student, law enforcement can detain the student and question them (complete the assessment). Child welfare workers can also interview a child without parental consent, based on allegations of child abuse or neglect.

In addition to considerations surrounding consent to interview, members of the behavioral threat assessment team should identify instances where a release of information is needed to access student records during the information gathering stage of a behavioral threat assessment and work to obtain signed releases. Having signed release of information forms can also be helpful in the management phase of a behavioral threat assessment for monitoring student progress with intervention programming. Examples may include attendance records, personal identifying information, discipline history, and previous schools attended.⁵

⁴ State law does not provide a specific statute that authorizes schools, law enforcement, and child welfare professionals to interview students without parental consent. However, several statutes generally provide this authority. Revised Code 3313.20(A) permits a school district to make any rules that are necessary governing the employees, pupils of its schools, and all other persons entering upon its school grounds. Revised Code Sections 3313.669 and 5502.262(B)(2)(d) require schools to establish threat assessment teams and establish a protocol for addressing potential threats. Section 3313.951(D) permits a school resource officer to carry out duties that may include threat investigations. In addition, several court decisions have held that questioning of a juvenile is not a violation of the Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination merely because it occurs in a school and the presence of a police officer. In re Haubeil, 2002 Ohio 4095 (4th Dist. 2002); In re Bucy, 1996 Ohio App. LEXIS 4842 (9th Dist. 1996); In re Johnson, 1996 Ohio App. LEXIS 2972 (5th Dist. 1996). However, if there is evidence that the student was under arrest or told he was not free to leave, then any discussions may be suppressed from a resulting criminal case. In re L.G., 2017 Ohio 2781 (2nd Dist. 2017)

⁵ More information on privacy rights can be found in the [National Association of School Psychologists' Report on Protecting Students' Rights in Behavioral Threat Assessment Management](#).

In the past, schools and law enforcement did not commonly share information about students due to concerns about federal regulations on confidentiality⁶. However, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) already provides some guidance as to when schools can share student information with law enforcement.

FERPA 34 CFR 99.36 informs us of what conditions apply to disclosure of information in health or safety emergencies:

- (a) An educational agency or institution may disclose personally identifiable information from an education record to appropriate parties, including parents of an eligible student, in connection with an emergency if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals.
- (b) Nothing in this Act or this part shall prevent an educational agency or institution from -
 - (1) Including in the education records of a student appropriate information concerning disciplinary action taken against the student for conduct that posed a significant risk to the safety or well-being of that student, other students, or other members of the school community;
 - (2) Disclosing appropriate information maintained under paragraph (b)(1) of this section to teachers and school officials within the agency or institution who the agency or institution has determined have legitimate educational interests in the behavior of the student; or
 - (3) Disclosing appropriate information maintained under paragraph (b)(1) of this section to teachers and school officials in other schools who have been determined to have legitimate educational interests in the behavior of the student.
- (c) In making a determination under paragraph (a) of this section, an educational agency or institution may take into account the totality of the circumstances pertaining to a threat to the health or safety of a student or other individuals. If the educational agency or institution determines that there is an articulable and significant threat to the health or safety of a student or other individuals, it may disclose information from education records to any person whose knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals. If, based on the information available at the time of the determination, there is a rational basis for the determination, the Department will not substitute its judgment for that of the educational agency or institution in evaluating the circumstances and making its determination.

Schools can disclose information that is considered “directory” information without consent. According to FERPA, directory information includes a student’s name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance.

According to FERPA, schools must have consent to release student records. Records may be released in certain circumstances without the consent of parents or students. One of those circumstances is to, “appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies.” Another

⁶ Columbine Review Commission, 2001, p.108

circumstance where the disclosure of student information is allowed without consent is under FERPA 34 CFR 99.31 “State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law.” This information is specifically cited on the U.S. Department of Education, Family Policy Compliance Office website.⁷

FERPA *does not apply* to several communications regarding students. Information reported about a student to school staff by another student, either verbally or in writing, is not protected under FERPA. Personal observations of a student or their behavior by school staff are not protected under FERPA. Social media posts made by a student and discovered by school personnel are not protected under FERPA.

⁷ <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>

How to Establish a Behavioral Threat Assessment Model

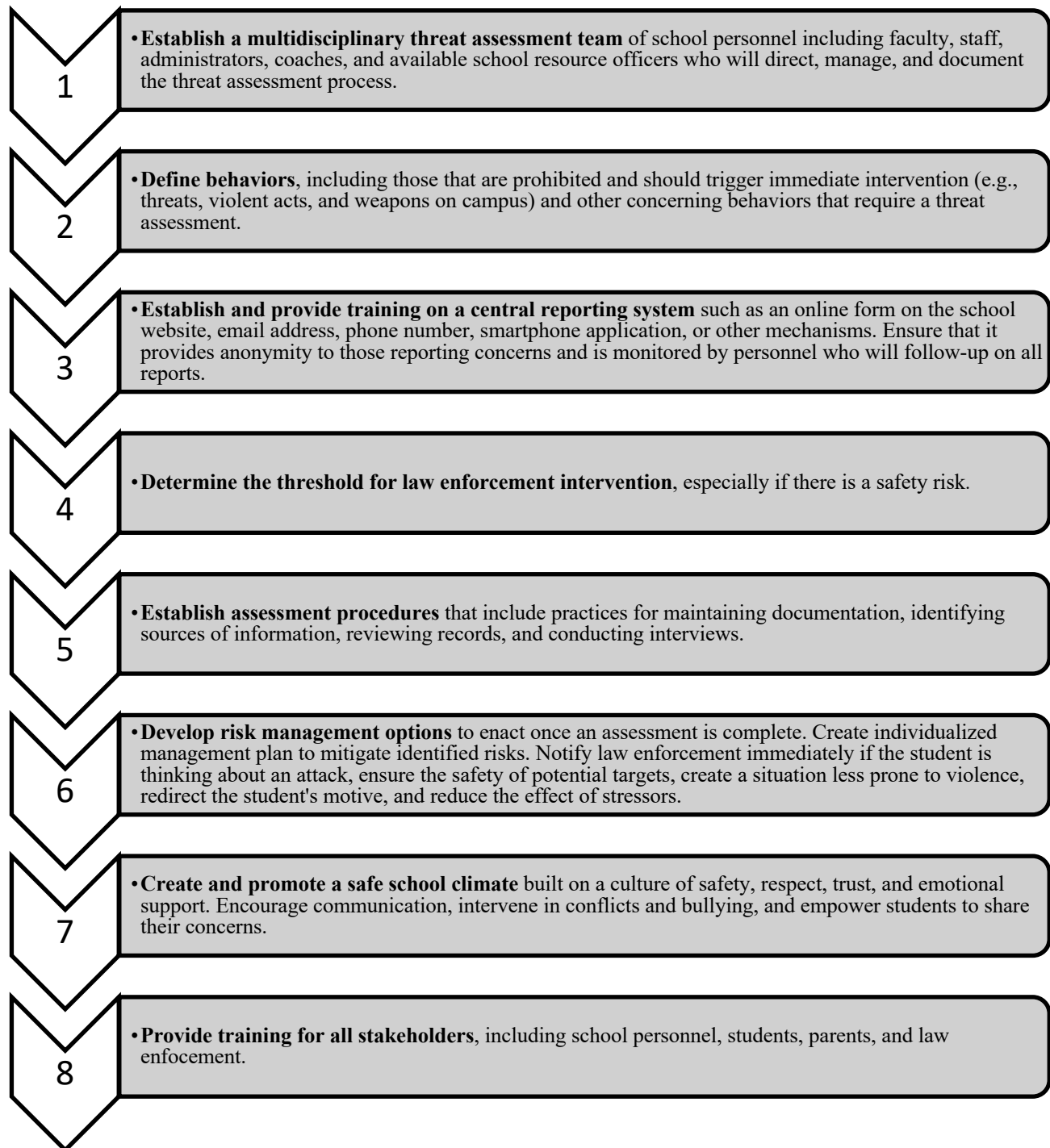
History: Research and Guidance on School Violence Prevention: The U.S. Secret Service

For over 20 years, the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) has produced operationally relevant, behavior-based research on the prevention of targeted violence in various contexts, including attacks targeting public officials and public figures, government facilities, workplaces, public spaces, K-12 schools, and institutes of higher education.

Following the tragedy at Columbine High School in 1999, the Secret Service partnered with the U.S. Department of Education on a study that examined 37 incidents of targeted school violence that occurred from 1974-2000. The *Safe School Initiative* focused on gathering and analyzing information about the thinking and behavior displayed by the students who committed these violent acts. The publication of the final report and accompanying guide provided schools and law enforcement with a framework for how to identify, assess, and manage students who display threatening or concerning behavior, with efforts focusing on determining what could be known prior to a violent school attack.

In response to the Feb. 14, 2018, attack at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., the Secret Service published an updated operational guide on school threat assessment, intended to provide K-12 schools with actionable steps on creating a targeted violence prevention plan. *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for [Preventing Targeted School Violence](#)* is an 8-step “how to” that outlines the process of establishing a multidisciplinary threat assessment team, protocols for gathering information, and management strategies for reducing a student’s risk of harm to self or others.

8 Steps to Establishing a Behavioral Threat Assessment Model:⁸



⁸ National Threat Assessment Center, 2018

In 2019, the Secret Service published [*Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence*](#). This study examined 41 incidents of targeted school violence that occurred at K-12 schools in the United States from 2008 to 2017. This report offers an in-depth analysis of the motives, behaviors, circumstances, and situational factors of the attackers, as well as an analysis of the tactics, resolutions, and other operationally relevant details of the attacks. This report was produced to inform the best practices of multidisciplinary school threat assessment programs nationwide.

Key Findings and Implications from <i>Protecting America's Schools</i>
1. There is no profile of a student attacker, nor is there a profile for the type of school that has been targeted.
2. Attackers usually had multiple motives, the most common involving a grievance with classmates.
3. Most attackers used firearms, and firearms were most often acquired from the home.
4. Most attackers had experienced psychological, behavioral, or developmental symptoms.
5. Half of the attackers had interests in violent topics.
6. All attackers experienced social stressors involving their relationships with peers and/or romantic partners.
7. Nearly every attacker experienced negative home life factors.
8. Most attackers were victims of bullying, which was often observed by others.
9. Most attackers had a history of school disciplinary actions, and many had prior contact with law enforcement.
10. All attackers exhibited concerning behaviors. Most elicited concern from others, and most communicated their intent to attack.

In 2021, the Secret Service published [*Averting Targeted School Violence: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Plots Against Schools*](#). This study built upon the existing research around targeted violence in schools by examining thwarted attack plots against K-12 schools from 2006-2018. A comparison between these plotters and individuals who perpetrated attacks in K-12 schools found that the behavioral backgrounds were very similar.

Key Findings and Implications from <i>Averting Targeted School Violence</i>
1. Targeted school violence is preventable when communities identify warning signs and intervene.
2. Schools should seek to intervene with students before their behavior warrants legal consequence.
3. Students were most often motivated to plan a school attack because of a grievance with classmates.
4. Students are best positioned to identify and report concerning behaviors displayed by their classmates.

Key Findings and Implications from *Averting Targeted School Violence*

5. The role of parents and families in recognizing concerning behavior is critical to prevention.
6. School resource officers (SROs) play an important role in school violence prevention.
7. Removing a student from school does not eliminate the risk they might pose to themselves or others.
8. Students displaying an interest in violent or hate-filled topics should elicit immediate assessment and intervention.
9. Many school attack plots were associated with certain dates, particularly in the month of April. More information can be found in the report.
10. Many of the students had access to weapons, including unimpeded access to firearms.

Secret Service research findings and implications demonstrate that *school violence is preventable, if communities can identify the warning signs and appropriately intervene.*

Ohio School Behavioral Threat Assessment Model Protocols

The following is a guide for how to complete the Ohio School Behavioral Threat Assessment Model Protocol. It is important to note that all documentation of actions taken should be completed on the *Ohio School Threat Assessment Form*. Schools may request this form from their OSSC regional liaison or directly from the OSSC by emailing ohioschoolsafetycenter@dps.ohio.gov.

A behavioral threat assessment is predicated on bystanders reporting their concerns when they observe concerning behavior. As such, schools should actively encourage bystander reporting. School staff, students, parents, and other community members should be trained on identifying concerning behaviors and communications, and how to report those concerns using the [Safer Ohio School Tip Line](#) anonymous reporting system, or through other avenues as appropriate.

The Ohio School Behavioral Threat Assessment Model Protocol involves 3 Phases. Each phase will be described briefly here.

When the threat assessment team at a school receives a report, **Phase 1** of the Threat Assessment Model Protocol is initiated.

Phase 1:

Initial response and Information Gathering. Phase 1 of the behavioral threat assessment process includes initiating emergency protocols when appropriate and moving through the initial information gathering stage. Initial information is gathered through interviews with relevant parties, and an initial Classification Level is determined.

If the result of Phase 1 is a Classification Level of moderate, high, or imminent, the team should proceed to **Phase 2** of the Threat Assessment Model Protocol for additional information gathering (a Classification Level of low will progress directly to Phase 3).

Phase 2:

Additional Information Gathering and Risk Classification. Phase 2 of the behavioral threat assessment process includes opportunities for additional information gathering for individuals with an initial Classification Level of moderate, high, or imminent. Additional information gathering includes identification of other factors of concern, protective factors, as well as additional sources of information. At this stage, the team will review and adjust the Classification Level as appropriate based on the findings from the additional information gathering process.

All behavioral threat assessments will proceed to **Phase 3** of the Threat Assessment Model Protocol, where the team develops a plan to intervene and manage the concern.

Phase 3:

Intervention and Case Management. Phase 3 of the behavioral threat assessment process includes identifying and implementing intervention and risk mitigation strategies. This should include a *Case Plan* to assist with case management strategies.

The following sections describe Phase 1, Phase 2, and Phase 3 in greater detail.

Phase I: Initial Response and Information Gathering

Once the school receives information regarding a prohibited or concerning behavior, the likelihood that the behavior could result in harm must be determined. In Phase I of the Behavioral Threat Assessment Model Protocol, the threat assessment team will make a determination that will guide their actions in the following phases. The first step in Phase I is to document the staff members who are completing the required tasks for Phase I. The first page of the threat assessment form is where this information should be documented.

The next step in Phase I is to interview the reporting person. If the reporting person perceives the concerning behavior to indicate a serious and imminent threat, the reporting person should call law enforcement immediately. Keep in mind that if there is a school resource officer (SRO) in the building they should be a part of the threat assessment team. The staff member may report the concerning information to the SRO instead of calling 911. If the reporting person is unknown or not available the interview may not be able to be completed, but the rest of Phase I should continue as outlined.

Depending on the information that the staff member provides to the threat assessment team or law enforcement, immediate action may be required to prevent serious injury or death. If this is the case, the threat assessment process should be postponed until the environment has been made safe.

Documentation should be completed regarding the information gathered from the reporting person on the *Threat or Concerning Behavior Report*. The information required on this report is the minimum information that should be gathered. If the team determines that additional information is needed, they should add more.

The next section in Phase I is the *Emergency Operations/Notifications* section. This is where contact with the parents of the involved students will be documented. Documenting who made

these contacts, who was spoken to, and the time these contacts occurred can prove to be very helpful in protecting against liability.

The next section outlines interviews that should be completed to collect information about the concerning incident. At this time, the teacher interview should be completed by all teachers that have regular or noteworthy contact with the concerning student. A specific deadline for the completion of these interviews should be set. Staff members should be informed that the request for the information (and the information itself) contained in these documents is confidential and should not be shared with others.

The questions listed on the interview sheets for the staff members, subject of concern, potential targets, parents/guardians, and witnesses are not exhaustive. If the team determines that there are additional questions that need to be asked, they can be documented on a separate sheet and attached to the documented interview.

Considerations for Information Gathering

When the threat assessment team is investigating a report, the team should be sure to examine the following behavioral themes.⁹ These behavioral themes are not an exhaustive list and should not serve as a checklist, but rather as a starting point for the information gathering process.

- The student's motives and goals.
- Concerning, unusual, or threatening communications.
- Inappropriate interest in weapons, school shooters, mass attacks, or other types of violence.
- Access to weapons.
- Stressful events, such as setbacks, challenges, or losses.
- Home-life factors (e.g., domestic violence, abuse, instability).
- Impact of emotional or developmental issues.
- Evidence of desperation, hopelessness, or suicidal thoughts/gestures.
- Whether the student views violence as an option to solve problems.
- Whether others are concerned about the student's statements or behaviors.
- Capacity to carry out an attack.
- Evidence of planning for an attack.
- Consistency between the student's statements and actions.
- Protective factors such as positive or prosocial influences or events.

The Importance of Rapport Building

Teams should establish rapport with those that they are interviewing. Some of the information that will be discussed can be considered sensitive and some may be reluctant to share it with someone they do not trust. Reassuring them that the goal of this process is to determine how to best help the person of concern can help develop that trust. One approach to build trust while gathering information is to clarify roles at the onset of the interview. Role clarification includes providing a context to the behavioral threat assessment process, explaining expectations of the interviewee and the interviewer, and outlining the process moving forward while addressing

⁹ National Threat Assessment Center, 2018, p. 8

questions surrounding confidentiality. Role clarification should include the following steps:

Step 1

Provide an overview of the goals of the behavioral threat assessment program.

Step 2

Provide an overview of your role on the behavioral threat assessment team, and what you hope to accomplish during the interview.

Step 3

- *Discuss the steps of the behavioral threat assessment and interview process,*
- *Explain what is requested of the interviewee, and*
- *Identify the roles of other individuals involved in the behavioral threat assessment process.*

Step 4

- *Discuss expectations of confidentiality,*
- *Explain what information can be shared in accordance with FERPA, and*
- *Who has access to the responses from this interview?*

In addition to role clarification, paying close attention to the interviewee and using active listening skills can assist in building trust.

Risk Classification Level

As information is gathered from interviews and other sources, the team will use the information to assess a level of risk posed by the individual of concern. When determining the level of risk associated with a threat, the central question is not whether a person *made a threat*, but whether a person *poses a threat*.

Classification Level		Suggested Response Guide
LOW	<p>The reported concerning behavior has been investigated and assessed as benign. The individual or situation does not appear to pose a risk of violence or serious harm to self or others, and any exhibited issues or concerns can be addressed using existing support structures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate information to school leadership • Notify appropriate school staff, to include the SRO • Contact parents/guardians of student of concern • Determine if school and/or community-based referrals are needed • Continue to monitor behavior through school counselor follow-up • Determine if a release of information is needed, and obtain signatures when appropriate • Develop a management plan (Phase 3)
MODERATE	<p>The individual or situation does not appear to pose a risk of violence or serious harm to self or others, at this time; however, the behaviors exhibited indicate a need for intervention. Examples of interventions that may be required include increased academic or behavioral supports, services intended to address the impact of stressors, mental health or drug abuse treatment, and mediation for student conflicts or bullying.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate information to school leadership • Notify appropriate school staff, to include the SRO • Contact parents/guardians of student of concern • Determine if school and/or community-based referrals are needed, and initiate appropriate referrals for the student of concern • Determine if a release of information is needed, and obtain signatures when appropriate • Assign a team member to monitor behavior and student response to interventions • Incidents at this level may require law enforcement notification if prohibited behaviors are present • Continue gathering more information (Phase 2) and develop a management plan (Phase 3)
HIGH	<p>The individual or situation appears to pose a risk of violence or serious harm to self or others. The behaviors exhibited may indicate the student is considering a planned act of violence, has planned to harm self or others, or other concerning behaviors or communications that indicate an interest and/or intention to commit violence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidents at this level may require immediate law enforcement intervention or hospitalization • Communicate information to school leadership • Notify appropriate school staff, to include the SRO • Contact parents/guardians of student of concern • Provide direct supervision of the student until any immediate concerns are addressed • Follow district policies for notifying parents/guardians and potential victims • Initiate interventions to stabilize the situation as needed • Determine if a release of information is needed, and obtain signatures when appropriate • Assign a team member to monitor behavior and student response to interventions • Continue gathering more information (Phase 2) and develop a management plan (Phase 3)

IMMINENT	<p>The individual or situation appears to pose an immediate risk of violence toward self or others that requires immediate containment and action to prevent violence from occurring.</p> <p>The individual is known to have the present desire and capacity to conduct a violent act.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidents at this level require immediate law enforcement intervention or hospitalization • Notify the SRO/law enforcement to address imminent risk • Initiate lock-down procedures, per policy, if appropriate • Communicate information to school leadership • Notify appropriate school staff • Contact parents/guardians of student of concern • Provide direct supervision of the student until parents/guardians assume custody and/or the student is removed from campus • Follow district policies for notifying parents/guardians and potential victims • Initiate interventions to stabilize the situation as needed • Determine if a release of information is needed, and obtain signatures when appropriate • Assign a team member to monitor behavior and student response to the safety and intervention plan • Gather more information (Phase 2) and develop a management plan (Phase 3)
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Based on the information collected, one of the following four Classification Levels will be assigned to the behavior: low, medium, high, or imminent. An initial *Suggested Response Guide* for each level outlines actionable steps staff can take to address the potential risk of harm.

Those evaluating the risk associated with a concerning behavior should keep in mind that a student demonstrating a pattern of concerning behavior over time may warrant an elevated Classification Level. If you observe an escalating pattern of low-level concerning behavior, all three phases of the threat assessment process should be completed to determine if the student requires additional resources.

The Classification Level assigned to a concerning behavior will determine the next steps to be taken in the threat assessment process. If the behavior is determined to be low risk, and it is not connected to an escalating pattern of behavior, you may decide as a team to proceed to Phase III and document the outcomes associated with this behavior. However, if you determine that the behavior should be assessed at medium, high, or imminent risk, you should proceed to Phase II of the threat assessment process before moving to Phase III.

The team will need to document the Classification Level at which the behavior is assessed and the justification for that decision. If the team is made aware of additional information, the Classification Level could change. Any change in Classification Level should be documented and the date/time of the change should be noted as well.

Phase II: Additional Information Gathering and Risk Classification

If it is determined that Phase II of the threat assessment process will need to be completed, documentation should continue regarding any interviews or investigation that has been completed thus far. Each member of the behavioral threat assessment team taking part in the assessment should be listed, along with their position, phone number, and email address. The same team members may take part in Phase II as in Phase I, but their information should still be entered on the Phase II documentation.

In Phase II, all additional sources of information should be noted. Additional documents gathered should be attached to the behavioral threat assessment paperwork. The team may discover that more information is needed. These tasks should be assigned by the leader of the team and expectations about when the information is needed should be clear. Care should be taken to document each task being completed, when and by whom. If information is required from outside sources, be certain to document who was contacted to provide the information. Additionally, if any consent to release information, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or court orders exist between entities (in regard to this student), they should be referenced/attached as well.

It is the responsibility of the team leader to make sure all of the assigned tasks are completed within the time limits set by the team.

Once all the necessary information has been collected, the team will reconvene and complete the *Key Observations, Factors of Concern, and Protective Factors Checklists*. This document can be requested from your OSSC liaisons or the OSSC directly. Once the checklists have been completed, the team may determine that more information is needed. If the team determines that all the necessary information has been gathered and evaluated, they will assess and revise the Classification Level, as needed. The team will then determine an appropriate response to the concerning behavior.

Going forward, a Classification Level can be amended based upon new information, mitigating circumstances, aggravating circumstances, or upon successful compliance with interventions. ***It is important to remember that removing a student from school does not mean that student no longer poses a risk of harm to themselves or others. If the student's behavior indicates that they still pose such a risk, the Classification Level should not be lowered.***

Phase III: Intervention and Case Management

Once a Classification Level has been assigned, a determination regarding the response to that behavior must be made. The behavioral threat assessment team will be a part of that decision in order to examine and consider all possible outcomes. However, each school will need to evaluate potential outcomes based on their policy and code of conduct. Additionally, law enforcement, social services, and other stakeholders will need to determine if there are actions that they will need to take in this situation, as well.

There may be additional stakeholders outside of the behavioral threat assessment team that may be of value to the team in determining the appropriate outcomes or interventions. Teams should consider including community case managers, special education case managers, teachers, counselors/therapists, social workers, parents/guardians, MTSS or student assistant program teams,

and mentors. Any person taking part in Phase III decisions should be documented on the Phase III fact sheet.

Once the most appropriate response is determined, documentation will need to be completed regarding the outcome. The team will complete the *Response to Threat or Concerning Behavior Checklist*. If you determine that a different resource is needed than what can be found on the checklist, document what that resource is and how it will be monitored. Once the checklist has been completed a *Case Plan* will need to be completed as well.

A *Case Plan* will help the team determine if the concerning person is complying with the interventions designed to mitigate their concerning behavior and promote successful outcomes. A staff member should be assigned to each requirement listed in the plan to ensure that requirement is being complied with. This should include the duration and frequency of assigned tasks, as well as a specific date set for the team to review progress.

Teams should ensure consistency between behavioral threat assessment and case management strategies. Based on an individualized assessment of the risk posed by the individual, teams will employ case management strategies that are appropriate, fair, and reasonable to address the concerns identified. For each Classification Level, there is a minimal level of response or intervention that should guide the initial development of a case management strategy (see *Risk Classification*). ***A given case may have a fact pattern that necessitates deviation from the general guidelines. When that is the case, teams should deliberate, reach consensus upon action steps, and document the facts or circumstances that factored into their case management planning.***

When developing individualized case management plans for the individual, teams should attempt to identify interventions that align with best practices, for example, evidence-based interventions for bullying, suicidal ideation, and drug use. Informal strategies can also be utilized to provide the student of concern with additional support, for example, assigning a teacher mentor to routinely check in with the student and support their case management plan. In addition, ***case management plans should consider the student's Classification Level and match the level of services, interventions applied, and monitoring to the student's needs*** identified during the behavioral threat assessment process. *Case Plans/Plans of Support* should consider the student's learning style, cognitive level, social connections, emotional development, disabilities and personality characteristics.

A *Case Plan* can include a variety of actions that guide a student's emotional development or reduces risk of harm to self and others. The following is a list of possible interventions, but a school may take any other actions that are deemed advisable and/or necessary:

- Rapport-building
- Enhancing skill deficits, such as problem-solving skills, coping skills, communication skills, advocacy skills, and anger management skills.
- Check-in/Check-out
- Mentoring
- Bag/Locker searches
- Assessments by counselor/therapist
- Change of schedule/placement
- Cognitive-behavioral interventions

- Referring for behavioral health treatment

The behavioral threat assessment team should be meeting regularly to review *Case Plans/Plans of Support* completed on previous threat assessments. The teams should be reviewing information and reports regarding the concerning person's compliance/progress in order to assess intervention results and modify the case plan. At that time, the team will determine if it is appropriate to decrease or elevate the Classification Level assigned to the concerning person. The team may also decide that the person's progress has been successful enough to discontinue the *Case Plan*.

Again, it is the responsibility of the team leader to make sure all the assigned tasks in the Case Plan are being completed successfully. If the student requires an extended period of monitoring, regular meetings of the threat assessment team will be scheduled and documented.

As best practice dictates in the treatment of juveniles, interventions should be implemented in the least restrictive environment. School administrators and law enforcement should provide a supportive environment for the individual and the safest situation possible for the school community.

Additional Considerations

Schools should review their code of conduct, policies/procedures, and any memoranda of understanding with outside agencies to ensure that they are aligned with recommended best practices and current state and federal law.

Complying with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act

It should be noted that the completion of a threat assessment does not excuse a school from following all Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements for students with disabilities. Instead, the threat assessment process should be completed concurrent to any IDEA or ADA required process, to determine if the student's needs are being met by their current services. Conversely, the presence of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) does not excuse a school from completing a behavioral threat assessment, which should be a collaborative process in conjunction with any IEP requirements. For example, an IEP for a child who has difficulty expressing himself may have accommodations in place so that in times of crisis he goes to talk to a trusted person such as a counselor, not the SRO. If instead of the counselor the SRO interviews the child during that time of crisis, the IEP may have been violated, and the child's behavior may escalate.¹⁰

¹⁰ Additional information can be found in the [National Association of School Psychologists' Report on Protecting Students' Rights in Behavioral Threat Assessment Management](#).

Records Retention and Sharing

The completed behavioral threat assessment form and associated corroborating documents should be maintained as a part of the student of concern's education record. Should a student transfer to another school district, there is no legal requirement to prevent the receiving school district from viewing these records. For example, if a student transfers to another school district to avoid expulsion, it does not mean that this student no longer poses a risk. Information regarding the student's threatening/concerning behavior and actions taken to mitigate such behaviors should be shared with the receiving school district as soon as possible. ***If an expulsion process has been initiated as a result of prohibited/concerning behavior, regardless of whether a student transfers to another school district, the expulsion process should be completed.***

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