

Violent and Aggressive Behavior (Threat Assessment Protocol)

The following procedures were adapted with permission from the Adams County Youth Initiative's threat assessment documents. We appreciate their excellent work and thank them for sharing. This information 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.

The Safe School Initiative

In 2002, the U.S. Secret Service in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education completed the *Safe School Initiative* (SSI), a study of school shootings and other school-based attacks. This study examined nationwide data from 1974 through 2000, analyzing a total of 37 incidents involving 41 student attackers. The information gleaned from this study resulted in the following 10 conclusions about school attacks:

1. Incidents of targeted violence at school rarely were sudden, impulsive acts.
2. Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack.
3. Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing the attack.
4. There is no accurate or useful "profile" of students who engaged in targeted school violence.
5. Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.
6. 6 Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide.
7. Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.
8. Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
9. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
10. Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.

The SSI made the key recommendation that schools develop multidisciplinary threat assessment teams who can aid in the prevention and intervention of students who may pose potential threats for targeted violence.

Threat Assessment Principles

The SSI further identified six principles that form the foundation of an effective threat assessment process.

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. Effective threat assessment requires an investigative, skeptical, inquisitive mindset during the Threat Assessment Process.
4. Effective threat assessment is based on facts, rather than characteristics or traits.
5. Effective threat assessment requires an integrated systems approach.
6. Investigate whether or not a student poses a threat, not whether a student has *made* a threat.

Summary of the Secret Service Eleven Questions

Based on the SSI findings, the Secret Service identified eleven key questions that can help determine if a threat is viable. Both the *Threat Assessment Screen* and the *Full Team Threat Assessment* utilize these eleven 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, and/or incidents of mass violence?
4. Has the student engaged in attack related behaviors?
5. Does the student have the capacity to carry out the threat?
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. Are other people concerned about the student's potential for violence?
10. Is the student's conversation and "story" consistent with their actions?
11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of violence?

BASICS OF THREAT ASSESSMENT

Identifying Threats

A threat is any expression of intent to do harm, acting out violently against someone or something or being in possession of an instrument of harm. This Threat Assessment Protocol will help determine if a threat is plausible or substantive and will help identify necessary interventions to safely address the concern. School officials should initiate this process when a student's behavior and/or communications deviates from their own normal behavior or from peer norms and/or when this behavior prompts concern for the student's safety or the safety of others.

Purpose of Threat Assessment

The purpose of conducting a threat assessment screen or team review is to determine the degree to which a student who has made a threat actually poses a threat to person, school, and/or community and to develop a plan to respond, manage, and support the student and all involved.

Communicating Threats

A threat can be conveyed through a variety of means; Threats may be written, spoken, communicated by using gestures, or even through a person's actions. For example:

- **Written:** Internet, email, social network sites, writings, pictures, hit list
- **Verbal:** Directly, indirectly, voice mails, messages, and third person
- **Physical Gestures:** Body language, posture
- **Actions:** Possessing weapons or dangerous items

Types of Threats

All threats should be taken seriously and all threats require individual assessment. Just as importantly, all threats necessitate a coordinated plan to respond, manage and support all involved. There are several types of threats. The more specific and plausible the details, the more likely the student will act on it. Threats can be classified into different categories:

- **Conditional:** Extortion (e.g., "if you don't do this, I will do this")
- **Veiled:** Implies violent behavior without actually identifying what the behavior is (e.g., "we would be better off without Johnny anymore")
- **Indirect:** Vague, ambiguous threat not directed at an individual or group (e.g., "someone is going to die" or being in possession of weapon)
- **Direct:** Clear, specific threat made against an individual or a group of individuals (e.g., "Johnny is going to die tomorrow")

Threat Assessment Process and Procedures

The threat assessment team will meet under the direction of the superintendent or a school principal or designee when a threat is reported from any part of the school community in alignment with the following steps.

The Weld RE-5J school board provides the superintendent of schools the authority to conduct a threat assessment in response to any form of threat that he/she deems requires this action. The threat assessment process will be conducted in alignment with district written policies and procedures and by staff who are trained to conduct this assessment. A district level threat assessment team will monitor this process under the direction of the superintendent of school or his/her designee. (Board Policy JICDD, JICDD-R and JICDD-E)

Threat Assessment Team

Maintain a trained multidisciplinary threat assessment team.

Threat assessment requires a trained threat assessment team, which will respond to the threat, manage the situation, and support those impacted by the threat. Membership of this team may vary depending on the situation and the student being assessed. Teams must be trained, regularly practice and review threat assessment procedures.

Threat Assessment Team Membership

The primary role of the team is to guide the assessment and management of threats and to ensure ongoing monitoring. It is important to establish a trained core team consisting of three to four people, at least two of whom work at the school full time. Effective threat assessment team members have an objective, analytical and investigative mindset and have the ability to relate and communicate well with others.

Required threat assessment team membership includes:

- Director of Special Education – team facilitator
- A member of the building administration
- A mental health professional, such as a school psychologist, social worker, or counselor with training in threat assessment
- School Resource Officer
- Additional members as assigned by principal/administrator

Roles and responsibilities of the team-

Roles and responsibilities of teams include, identifying a team leader (typically an administrator) who has the authority to make decisions based on the safety of the school. In addition, the team leader is responsible for ensuring that the following tasks are completed:

- Convening the initial meeting and delegates information gathering
- Facilitating the threat assessment meeting
- Recording the data and documenting the process
- Identifying who should receive information and what information should be received

THREAT ASSESSMENT INQUIRY STEPS

1. Identify Potential or Known Threat and Notify Law Enforcement

It is incumbent upon the personnel with knowledge of the potential threat to use professional discretion in determining whether the threat warrants an emergency response (i.e., call 911) or an immediate report to an administrator and law enforcement.

2. Secure the Safety of the School

The safety of the school, the students and the community is the priority consideration. The student of concern may be immediately and safely contained, if necessary and based on the severity of the concern, until safety procedures are initiated and the assessment process is activated. *If at any time information suggests the need for law enforcement assistance, that assistance should be requested immediately and school district crisis/emergency procedures would take priority over this protocol.*

3. Employ Threat Assessment Tools

- *Threat Assessment Screen*
- *Full Team Threat Assessment*

Every potential or known threat warrants, at minimum, a *Threat Assessment Screen* and a *Response, Management, and Support Plan (RMS Plan)*. The results of the *Threat Assessment Screen* will determine whether the RMS Plan can be developed to achieve a disposition of safety, or whether a *Full Team Threat Assessment* needs to be conducted.

4. Student may or may not pose a threat; Notify appropriate staff, students and parents

Team members will determine when to contact parents/guardians and others who may be impacted by the situation. Document the information according to district guidelines.

- Parents/guardians of the student who made the threat to involve them as appropriate and/or to conduct the assessment with or without their permission
- The potential targets and their parents/guardians
- Others who might be impacted by the threat including school staff, students and parents

5. When warranted, Convene the Threat Assessment Team and Complete the Full Team Threat Assessment

The *Full Team Threat Assessment* is designed to help determine what data to collect and will help organize and analyze the information to determine next steps. Some examples of information the Threat Assessment Team will explore include:

- The facts that drew attention to the student and the situation
- Information about the student
- Information about boundary probing and “attack-related” behaviors
- Motives
- Target selection

Information from a variety of sources helps put all of the pieces of the puzzle together and ensures the accuracy and validity of information. Examples of information sources the team may utilize include:

- School records
- Student interview
- Interviews with others who know the student of concern
- Parent/guardian interview
- Potential target(s) interview
- Outside sources of information

6. Determine the Level of Concern and Develop a Response, Management, and Support Plan

The *Full Team Threat Assessment* provides a process to analyze the information based on the Secret Service Eleven Key Questions. After each section, there is a place to determine the team’s level of concern for that portion of the assessment. At the completion of the assessment, you will be asked to determine a cumulative level of concern based on the following options:

- **Low Concern:** a threat which poses a minimal risk to the victim and public safety
- **Medium Concern:** a threat which could be carried out, although it may not appear entirely realistic
- **High Concern:** a threat that appears to pose an imminent and serious danger to the safety of others

This determination will lead the team to develop the *RMS Plan* that will outline steps to help respond, manage and support the individual of concern. The plan is designed to protect potential victims and address the student’s educational, social and emotional needs.

A written plan is recommended for five reasons:

1. To control/contain the situation and/or the individual in a way that will prevent the possibility of an attack
2. To establish clearly what has been decided and how the plan will be carried out

3. To provide adequate legal record of a reasonable and appropriate response to the threat
4. To provide information for school staff in the event of another incident or threatening situation involving the student
5. To provide support and guidance to the student

The written plan should include the immediate steps taken to prevent the threat from being actualized and should also determine who is responsible for ensuring follow through. Ordinarily these actions would include conditions under which the student could return to school, or continue in an alternative educational setting, and any interventions such as counseling or mediation that are deemed appropriate. See *RMS Plan*

A *Full Team Threat Assessment* is not considered complete until the team reaches consensus and understands the rationale for the results and an appropriate *RMS Plan* has been established. Teams should continue to ask questions until all members are confident in their final decisions.

7. Document the Threat Assessment

Every threat assessment requires documentation. The threat assessment team needs to document the behavior of concern, the inquiry process (including all names and dates of personal interviews), the resulting plan and any actions taken.

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. Documentation also ensures that students transferring schools continue to receive support and the receiving school can set up systems to ensure safety.

All documentation of any threat assessment including all of the data collected and corresponding forms will be maintained by a designated member of the threat assessment team at the school site. In addition, the team leader is responsible for ensuring that the *Threat Assessment Summary Documentation* form is complete, that records are kept according to district guidelines, and for relaying the information to the district's designated threat assessment administrator.

8. Monitor the Individual and the RMS Plan

The *Response, Management and Support Plan (RMS Plan)* is a dynamic document. It may be revised upon introduction of new information, failure of the plan to address safety in the capacity it was intended or other reasons decided upon by the team.

Monitoring the RMS Plan

Every RMS plan must include provision for follow-up contact with the student to verify that the plan has been successfully implemented to meet the school's safety needs and

the needs of the student. The RMS Plan will specify the individual or individuals responsible for follow-up contacts.

Revising the RMS Plan, As Needed

The team will continue to monitor the situation and make any changes in the plan necessary to maintain safety. RMS Plans must include provision for a follow-up review of the student's behavior and attitude toward the intended victim of the threat. Revise the plan if there is indication that the student is still at risk to carry out the threat or additional information is presented that remains unaddressed by the current plan.

Discontinuing the RMS Plan

A key focus of the Threat Assessment Protocol is to connect the student to services and support systems that reduce the likelihood that the student will engage in future threatening behavior. Monitoring of a student may be discontinued after responsible authorities have:

- Developed, implemented, and supported intervention strategies
- Have assessed that (and to what extent) the individual has changed unacceptable thinking and behavior over time

After a determination is made that the student no longer poses a threat of targeted school violence, formal monitoring is ended. The student, however, may still remain involved with service systems within the community that will support his or her continued successful functioning.

9. Records

All original documents created and/or used in the threat assessment process will be maintained in a central file at the district office by the designated threat assessment administrator.

A copy of completed threat assessment and all related materials will be maintained at the school by the principal or designee.

A copy of the threat assessment summary form and RMS plan will be placed in the student cumulative file.

A summary of the threat assessment will be made available to parent/guardian of the student who is being assessed.

10. Training

Building and district threat assessment team will receive training on an as needed basis. Team will regularly review the use of threat assessment procedures.

Date Adopted: **05/25/2016**

Date Revised: **10/12/2016**

LEGAL REF.: C.R.S. 22-32-109.1 (1)(b)(*definition of bullying*)

CROSS REFS: JBB* – Sexual Harassment

JICDA – Code of Conduct

JICDE* – Bullying Prevention and Education

JICF – Secret Societies/Gang Activity

JICI – Weapons in Schools