# Statewide Implementation of Student Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools

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# Overview

1. Background on threat assessment
2. Previous research
3. New preliminary findings

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## Effect of Gun Violence on American Schools

- Fear of seemingly dangerous students
- Expansion of zero tolerance discipline
- Increased school suspensions
- Increased school security measures
- Increased police presence in schools

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## FBI Recommendations on School Violence

“Although the risk of an actual shooting incident at any one school is very low, threats of violence are potentially a problem at any school. Once a threat is made, having a fair, rational, and standardized method of evaluating and responding to threats is critically important.”

(FBI report p 1)

Download at www.fbi.gov
Secret Service/DOE Recommendations:
• Create a planning team to develop a threat assessment program.
• Identify roles for school personnel.
• Clarify role of law enforcement.
• Conduct threat assessments of students who make threats of violence.

What is Threat Assessment?
• Threat assessment has varied meanings in military and law enforcement contexts.
• Behavioral threat assessment was developed as a strategy to prevent violence against government officials & public figures.
• Behavioral threat assessment also used to prevent workplace violence when an employee threatens violence.

What is Threat Assessment?

Threat assessment is a problem-solving approach to violence prevention that involves assessment and intervention with students who have threatened violence in some way.

Threat Assessment Takes a Problem-Solving Approach
The team takes action based on the seriousness of the threat.
• What protective action, if any, is needed?
• What problem stimulated the threat?
• What can be done to resolve that problem?

Continuum of Threats
• Warning of impending violence
• Attempts to intimidate or frighten
• Thrill of causing a disruption
• Attention-seeking, boasting
• Fleeting expressions of anger
• Jokes
• Figures of speech
Severe Violence Fights
Weekly
Bullying Daily
Arguments Daily

Serious Violent Victimization
- Ages 12-18
- Rape, robbery, aggravated assault
- 3.4 per thousand students per year

Homicides
- Ages 5-18
- 200 in ten years 2001-2011, 20 per year
- 120,000 schools + 20 =
- Average school occurrence is 1 every 6,000 years

School-based teams gather information
- Follow decision-tree to determine whether threat is transient or substantive
- Take protective action if needed
- Attempt to resolve the problem underlying the threat

Team roles
- Principal or Assistant Principal: Leads team, disciplinary decisions
- School Resource Officer: Advises team, responds to illegal actions and emergencies.
- Mental Health Staff: Team member to conduct mental health assessments. Team member to take lead role in follow-up interventions.
- Teachers, aides, other staff: Report threats, provide input to team. No additional workload.

School divisions may further specify team roles and include other staff to meet local needs.

![Threat Reporting Flowchart](chart.png)
Research on Threat Assessment

1. Initial field-test in 35 schools
2. Memphis field test
3. Special education outcomes
4. Staff response to training
5. High school climate retrospective study
6. High school suspension prospective study
7. Randomized control trial in 40 schools
8. Statewide suspension rate study

Research on Threat Assessment


Research on Threat Assessment

1. Reduced suspension rates
2. Increased use of counseling
3. Improved school climate
   - Less bullying
   - More student willingness to seek help

Renewed Public Concern

School shootings are so traumatic that they skew perceptions of school safety and convince the public and policymakers that there are dramatic needs for security measures.

Governor’s School and Campus Safety Task Force

40 members, Led by Secretaries of Public Safety, Education, and Health and Human Resources
http://dgos.virginia.gov/vcss/SchoolCampusSafetyTaskForce/
1. Statewide inventory of practices
2. Identification of best practices
3. Assessment of outcomes by race
4. Technical assistance/training
5. Randomized control trial on training effectiveness

1. Statewide inventory of practices
- Survey of schools for AY 2013-14
- 810 schools with at least 1 case
- Prevalence of threats
- Threat characteristics
- School response

All Preliminary Results!
- Many schools reported no threat cases, still implementing teams
- Will repeat the survey next fall

Student Threats to Harm Others

Prevalence of threats detected by school authorities in 431 elementary, 198 middle, and 181 high schools.

Types of Threats (%)

Percentages for 1,470 threat cases from 810 schools. One case can involve more than one type of threat.
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**Communication Method (%)**
- Verbal Direct: 63%
- Verbal 3rd Party: 17%
- Electronic Direct: 4%
- Electronic 3rd Party: 3%
- Paper: 8%
- Graffiti: 1%
- Other: 10%

**Intended Victim (%)**
- Student: 68%
- Teacher: 16%
- Whole school: 7%
- Staff: 5%
- Administrator: 3%
- Other: 8%

**Risk Level for 738 Threat Cases**
- Imminent: 3%
- High: 29%
- Moderate: 11%
- Low: 57%

**Threat Category for 732 Threat Cases**
- Very Serious Substantive: 16%
- Serious Substantive: 11%
- Transient: 76%

**Disciplinary Outcome (%)**
- Suspension out of school: 47%
- Reprimand: 38%
- Suspension in school: 13%
- None: 6%
- Detention after school: 6%
- Expulsion reduced to suspension: 6%
- Expelled: 2%
- Arrested: 1.5%
- Placed in juvenile detention: 1%

**School Placement Outcome (%)**
- No Change: 40%
- Transferred to alternative school: 10%
- Placed on homebound instruction: 5%
- Transferred to regular school: 1.3%
- Student changed residence: 1.4%
- Other: 6%
### Threat Outcomes (%)

- **Threat Not Attempted**: 98%
- **Attempted and Averted**: 2%
- **Threat Carried Out**: 2%

Percentages for 1,470 threat cases from 810 schools. Caution: no control group for these outcomes.

### Racial/Ethnic Background of Student Threat Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial/Ethnic Background</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Virginia High School Suspension Rates

- **Black**: 18.2%
- **State Average**: 9.2%
- **Native Amer**: 8.5%
- **Hawai/PI**: 7.6%
- **Hispanic**: 7.1%
- **White**: 6.7%
- **Asian**: 1.8%

34,977 high school students suspended at least once in 2013-2014. Black students suspended at double the state average rate.

### Racial/Ethnic Differences in Disciplinary Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial/Ethnic Background</th>
<th>Percent of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No statistically significant differences for White vs Black or White vs Hispanic students.

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**Virginia Student Threat Assessment Project**

- In our initial year, preliminary analyses show positive results for statewide implementation of student threat assessment.
- Schools are making differentiated assessments, recognizing that most cases are not serious.
- Most students are able to return to school, with few arrests or expulsions.
- Similar outcomes for Black, Hispanic, and White students.

**Next Steps....**

1. Statewide inventory of practices
2. Identification of best practices
3. Assessment of outcomes by race
4. Technical assistance/training
5. Randomized control trial on training effectiveness