

Threat Assessment Policy
Barrington Public Schools

PURPOSE

Barrington Public Schools (BPS) supports a culture of safety, respect, and emotional support that will diminish the possibility of violence in its schools. To that end, this policy establishes Threat Assessment Teams and a Threat Assessment Oversight Committee pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-21-23.2. The purpose of this policy is to prevent school violence by identifying and assessing threats, and developing threat management plans to manage and address the underlying causes of threatening behavior in students. This policy will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, and shall be automatically amended to conform to amendments and changes in applicable state and federal laws, rules, and regulations. For purposes of this policy, the term "threat assessment" shall include risk assessments (i.e., the assessment of the risk that a student poses to their own safety).

DEFINITIONS

Threat: A threat is a communication of intent to harm someone that may be spoken, written, gestured or expressed in other forms such as via text messaging, email or other digital means.

1. An expression of intent to harm someone is considered a threat regardless of whether it is communicated to the intended target(s) and regardless of whether the intended target is aware of the threat.
2. Threats may be implied by behavior that an observer would reasonably regard as threatening, planning, or preparing to commit a violent act.
3. When in doubt, treat the communication or behavior as a threat and conduct a threat assessment.

Aberrant or Worrisome Behavior: An individual's actions, statements, communications or responses that are unusual for the person or situation; or actions which could lead to violence toward self or others; or are reasonably perceived as threatening or causing concern for the wellbeing of the person or others in the community. These behaviors can include, but are not limited to:

- Unusual social distancing or isolation of subjects from peers and family members.
- Uncharacteristically sullen or depressed behavior.
- Out of context outbursts of verbal or physical aggression.
- Increased levels of agitation, frustration, and/or anger.
- Confrontational, accusatory or blaming behavior.
- An unusual interest in or fascination with weapons.
- Fixation on violence as a means of addressing a grievance.

Threat Assessment: A threat assessment is not a disciplinary tool. The tool allows professionals to answer the question “does this student pose a threat”, not whether they “made a threat”. It involves identifying student threats to commit a violent act, determining the seriousness of the threat, and developing intervention plans that protect potential victims and address the underlying problem or conflict that stimulated the threatening behavior.

Low Risk of Risk of Self-Harm or Suicide Low Risk: The student does not pose an imminent danger to themselves. Low-risk indicators may include thoughts of suicide only in the past, a history of mental health issues, no previous attempts or actions, no plan, no access to weapons or means, no recent losses, a robust support system in place, no alcohol/substance abuse, and demonstrates evidence of positive coping skills.

Level of Risk of Self-Harm or Suicide Moderate Risk: The student presents with a questionable or non-viable plan of harm to self (i.e., lacks clear or viable intent, ideation, and/or plan) but is deemed to be at elevated risk of harming self due to current stressors and/or lack of protective factors.

Level of Risk of Self-Harm or Suicide High Risk: The student poses an imminent danger to themselves with a viable plan to harm. High-risk indicators may include current thoughts of suicide, the current sense of hopelessness, previous attempts, self-injurious behavior, trauma/abuse, sexual identity issues, access to weapons or means, weak support system, alcohol/substance abuse, mental health history, and precipitating events, such as loss, trauma, victimization.

Transient Threat: A threat in which there is no sustained intent to harm.

Substantive Threat: A threat in which the intent is present (or unclear) requires protective action.

1. Serious: A threat to hit, fight or beat up.
2. Very Serious: A threat to kill, rape, or cause severe injury with a weapon.

THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM STRUCTURE

Districtwide Threat Assessment Oversight Committee: The Superintendent shall establish a Districtwide Threat Assessment Oversight Committee charged with oversight of the threat assessment teams operating within the District. The District Wide Threat Assessment Oversight Committee shall:

1. Provide oversight to school-based Threat Assessment Teams.
2. Maintain processes for effective information sharing between schools, community mental health organizations, law enforcement, and other public safety agencies.
3. Consult with law enforcement and public safety agencies, and community mental health providers as needed and in accordance with federal and state law and local policy

4. Continually assess the effectiveness of the threat assessment process throughout the District.
5. Recommend changes to regulations and procedures, as needed, to maintain an effective threat assessment process reflecting known best practices.
6. Assist school-based threat assessment teams when the school-based threat assessment team is not fully trained and/or not available to promptly and appropriately assess any concerning behavior.

School Threat Assessment Teams: The Superintendent shall establish, for each school, a threat assessment team (STAT) that shall include persons with expertise in guidance, counseling, school administration, mental health, and law enforcement. To be effective, STAT membership may change based on the circumstances of the threat to be assessed. Those individuals listed below, and any particular faculty or staff that may have specialized knowledge relevant to the assessment or management of the type of threat involved, or who may have a relationship with the student making the threat or exhibiting worrisome behavior, shall be included on the STAT.

Threat Assessment Team Membership on the School Team and District Oversight Committee should include:

1. School administrator.
2. School guidance counselor.
3. School psychologist and/or social worker.
4. Instructional staff.
5. Special education teacher or staff (especially when involving a student with an IEP or 504 plan).
6. Human resource professional (as needed).
7. Paraprofessional school staff, e.g. a coach or school nurse.
8. A non-law enforcement employee who has expertise in law enforcement.
9. Faculty and/or staff that have specialized knowledge relevant to the assessment or management of the threat.
10. Faculty and/or staff that have a relationship with the student (School-Level Only).

FUNCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM (STAT)

1. Maintain processes for effective information sharing between the team and community mental health organizations, law enforcement, and other public safety agencies.
2. Consult with law enforcement and public safety agencies, and community mental health providers as needed and in accordance with federal and state law and local policy.
3. Continually assess the effectiveness of the threat assessment process throughout the District and at the school level.
4. Recommend changes to regulations and procedures, as needed, to maintain an effective threat assessment process reflecting known best practices.
5. Meet whenever there is a concern regarding a student or situation that has been brought to the Team's attention.

6. Meet on a regular basis to engage in discussion, role-play scenarios, and professional learning.
7. Adhere to ethical and confidential requirements.
8. Assign responsibilities for conducting and reporting on the results of threat assessments following District Threat Assessment Protocols.
9. See Full Protocols at the end of the policy document
10. Per RIGL §16-21-23.2

"Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines" CSTAG (July 2021)

"Rhode Island Threat Assessment Teams Implementation Guidance," Rhode Island School Safety Committee (July 2019)

"Threat Assessment for School Administrators & Crisis Teams, National Association of School Psychologists (2015)

"Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools: Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines," Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (August 2016)

Barrington Public Schools School Committee

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