School Threat Assessment and Discipline[1]

We identified 35 publications addressing threat assessment and school discipline. Two themes emerged in this literature; how threat assessment differs from a zero tolerance approach to school discipline and the role of school discipline within a threat assessment framework. These publications include journal articles (n = 21), government/organization reports (8), books (2), book chapters (3) and other publications (1) published between 2001 and 2020.

Threat Assessment as an Alternative to Zero Tolerance and Exclusionary Discipline
Threat assessment is frequently presented as an alternative to a zero tolerance approach that relies on exclusionary discipline. Whereas a zero tolerance approach emphasizes the automatic administration of a harsh punishment such as exclusion from school through suspension or expulsion regardless of the circumstances or severity of the student's misbehavior, a threat assessment approach considers the nature and circumstances of the student's misbehavior and makes markedly less use of school exclusion (Maeng et al., 2019). School exclusion has been widely criticized in the educational field as an ineffective and often counter-productive disciplinary practice that fails to improve school safety and leads to higher rates of student failure and court involvement (Fabelo et al., 2011; Morgan et al., 2014). In contrast, threat assessment is a proactive approach designed to evaluate individual student behavior in context and to resolve problems before they escalate into violence (Fein et al., 2002; National Threat Assessment Center, 2018; O'Toole, 2000).

Studies of the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) found that schools using this model report lower suspension and expulsion rates than schools not using threat assessment (Nekvasil & Cornell, 2015).[2] These results have been replicated in field studies (Cornell & Sheras, 2004; Strong & Cornell, 2008) and controlled studies (Cornell et al., 2012; Cornell et al., 2011; Cornell et al., 2009; JustChildren & Cornell, 2013). The lower rates of school exclusion might be attributable in part to the emphasis in the training program on using threat assessment as an alternative to zero tolerance. Several studies of CSTAG training have found that school personnel who participate in the program report decreased fears of school violence and reduced support for zero tolerance and school suspension (Allen et al., 2008; Cornell, 2011; Cornell et al., 2011; Stohlman et al., 2020).

Role of Discipline within a TA Framework
Threat assessment is not a disciplinary action and threat assessment teams ordinarily do not control disciplinary actions, but the process can inform and influence disciplinary decisions. Reeves and Brock (2017) identified a variety of disciplinary actions that may be taken as a result of a threat assessment. These can range from apologies and reprimands to behavior contracts and changes in school schedules to detention, suspension, and expulsion. Reeves and Brock (2017) noted that supportive interventions are more effective in proactively addressing threats than disciplinary actions and that severe consequences should be used with caution because they promote disengagement from school. School-based disciplinary actions should be distinguished from law enforcement actions (such as arrest and court charges) that occur when a legal violation is found.

There is nationwide concern about racial and ethnic disparities in the use of school exclusion in American schools (Anderson & Ritter, 2017; Losen et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2014). One important benefit of a threat assessment approach is that it leads school authorities to carefully

consider the student's intentions and circumstances before making a disciplinary decision. Notably, several studies have found that racial and ethnic disparities are reduced or absent among students who have received a threat assessment (Cornell et al., 2018; Cornell & Lovegrove, 2015). There is also evidence that schools that adopt threat assessment show a general decline in the use of school suspension and some reduction in racial disparities (Cornell et al., 2011; JustChildren & Cornell, 2013; Nekvasil & Cornell, 2015). Although nearly all of this research has been conducted in Virginia, a study of three Colorado districts also found no disparities in disciplinary outcomes based on racial, ethnic, or disability status following threat assessment (Crepeau-Hobson & Leech, 2021).

There is also concern that students receiving special education services are subject to higher rates of school exclusion than other students (Miller & Meyers, 2015; Sullivan et al., 2013). One study specifically compared students in special education (SPED) to students in general education and found that students in the SPED group were referred for a threat assessment at a higher rate, but did not receive disproportionate disciplinary consequences, compared to students in the general education group (Kaplan & Cornell, 2005). Other studies have found that students in special education are referred for threat assessments at a higher rate than students in general education (Cornell et al., 2017), but that differences in school exclusion were small or statistically non-significant (Cornell et al., 2018). The Colorado study mentioned previously found no disparities in disciplinary outcomes based on disability status following a threat assessment (Crepeau-Hobson & Leech, 2021).

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Illustrated with numerous case studies--many drawn from the author's work as a forensic psychologist--this book identifies 19 myths and misconceptions about youth violence, from ordinary bullying to rampage shootings. Using a contrarian approach, the author demonstrates how fear of school violence has resulted in misguided, counterproductive educational policies and practices ranging from boot camps to zero tolerance. He reviews evidence from hundreds of controlled studies showing that well-tested, school-based violence prevention programs and mental health services are often overlooked in favor of politically popular yet ineffective programs such as school uniforms, Drug Abuse Resistance Education, and Scared Straight. He concludes by reviewing research on student threat assessment as a more flexible and less punitive alternative to zero tolerance, and presents recommendations for improving and expanding the use of school-based violence prevention programs and mental health services for troubled students. The book's mission is to translate scientific research into language that educators, students, parents, law enforcement officers, and policy makers can readily understand and to show what can be done to improve things. It is appropriate for courses or seminars dealing wholly or partly with school violence and school safety. It is also indispensable reading for school administrators and safety officers, policy makers at all levels, and for parents concerned about school violence and safety.

Cornell, D. G. (2011). A developmental perspective on the Virginia Student Threat Assessment
        Guidelines. *New Directions for Youth Development*, *129*, 43–59.
        https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.386

The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines were developed to help multi disciplinary school-based teams use a decision tree to evaluate student threats and take appropriate preventive action. A main goal of this approach is to allow school-based teams to recognize and respond to the developmental complexities of children and adolescents without resorting to the use of zero tolerance discipline. The model takes a triage approach that involves progressively more extensive assessment and intervention according to the severity of the threat and the student's intentions. The article summarizes two field test studies of the model, a study of training effects on staff attitudes and knowledge about violence prevention, and a quasi-experimental study showing that secondary schools using the model enjoyed a more positive school climate characterized by less bullying and greater willingness among students to seek help for threats of violence.

Cornell, D.G. (2015). Our schools are safe: Challenging the misperception that schools are dangerous places. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *85*, 217-220. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ort0000064

Massive public attention to school shootings has created the misperception that schools are dangerous places, even though crime statistics show that schools are one of the safest places in the United States. The fear of school shootings has caused many school systems to divert their budgets to excessive building security measures and adopt dubious crisis response plans. School disciplinary practices have shifted toward the criminalization of student misbehavior and a zero tolerance philosophy that fails to improve school safety and results in high rates of student suspensions and dropouts. The use of a threat assessment approach to evaluate individual student behavior in context and resolve conflicts and problems before they escalate into violence is one promising alternative that has been adopted statewide in Virginia public schools. School safety should focus on the everyday problems of bullying and fighting, and apply public health principles of primary and secondary prevention using well-established psychological interventions.

Cornell, D.G., & Allen, K. (2011). Development, evaluation, and future directions of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines. *Journal of School Violence*, *10*(1), 88–106. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2010.519432

The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines were developed in response to studies of school shootings conducted by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Secret Service, and U.S. Department of Education that recommended schools should adopt a threat assessment approach to prevent targeted violence. This article reviews the development and field-testing of the guidelines in a series of studies, and then describes the challenges of conducting a randomized controlled trial of threat assessment. The design, measurement, and logistical challenges of conducting rigorous research on student threat assessment are discussed.

Cornell, D. G., Allen, K., & Fan, X. (2012). A randomized controlled study of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines in kindergarten through grade 12. *School Psychology Review*, *41*(1), 100–115. https://doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2012.12087378

This randomized controlled study examined disciplinary outcomes for 201 students who made threats of violence at school. The students attended 40 schools randomly assigned to use the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines or follow a business-as-usual disciplinary approach in a control group. Logistic regression analyses found, after controlling for student gender, race, school level, and threat severity, that the 100 students in the threat assessment group schools were more likely to receive counseling services (odds ratio [OR] = 3.98) and a parent conference (OR = 2.57), and less likely to receive a long-term suspension (OR = 0.35) or alternative school placement (OR = 0.13) than the 101 students in the control group schools. Implementation fidelity was associated with decreased long-term suspension (OR = 0.73). These results provide strong empirical support for the use of student threat assessment in primary and secondary schools. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2019 APA, all rights reserved)

Cornell, D. G., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2011). Reductions in long-term suspensions following adoption of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines. *NASSP Bulletin*, *95*(3), 175–194. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636511415255

This quasi-experimental study examined the adoption of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines in 23 high schools. After training, school administrators and other staff members demonstrated substantial increases in knowledge of threat assessment principles and decreased commitment to zero tolerance approaches. Schools using the guidelines showed a 52% reduction in long-term suspensions and a 79% reduction in bullying infractions from the pretraining year to the posttraining year, in contrast to a control group of 26 schools not using the guidelines.

Cornell, D.G., & Lovegrove, P. (2015). Student threat assessment as a method for reducing student suspensions. In D. Losen (Ed.), *Closing the School Discipline Gap: Research for Policymakers* (pp. 180-191). New York, NY: Teachers College Press. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/18h2929c

This paper presents two studies of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines, which is a systematic method for schools to respond to student threats of violence without resorting to zero tolerance suspension. The first study reports secondary analyses from a randomized controlled trial which previously reported that students attending schools using the Virginia Guidelines were less likely to receive a long-term suspension (Odds Ratio = .35) than students attending control group schools using a zero tolerance approach (Cornell, Allen, & Fan, 2012). The secondary analyses found no difference in the impact on White versus Black students, which means that both racial groups benefitted from the intervention. The second study examined the scaled-up implementation of the Virginia Guidelines in Virginia public schools using a retrospective, quasi-experimental design. Schoolwide annual suspension rates were compared in 971 schools that chose to adopt the Virginia Guidelines versus 824 schools not using the Virginia Guidelines. Use of the Virginia Guidelines was associated with a 19% reduction in the number of long-term suspensions and an 8% reduction in the number of fewer short-term suspensions schoolwide during the 2010-2011 school year. Length of implementation was associated with greater reductions in suspensions. Schools with formal training in the Virginia Guidelines had greater reductions than schools that adopted them without formal training. There was not a significant interaction between use of the Virginia Guidelines and minority composition of the school, which means that schools of different racial composition demonstrated similar reductions. In conclusion, the two studies support use of the Virginia Guidelines as a promising approach for reducing suspension rates.

Cornell, D.G., Maeng, J., Burnette, A.G., Datta, P., Huang, F., & Jia, Y. (2016). Threat Assessment in Virginia Schools: Technical Report of the Threat Assessment Survey for 2014-2015. Charlottesville, VA: Curry School of Education, University of Virginia.

In 2013, Virginia passed legislation (§ 22.1-79.4) directing local school boards to establish threat assessment teams for each public school. The legislation also requires each threat assessment team to report quantitative data on its activities according to guidance developed by the

Department of Criminal Justice Services. To facilitate this data reporting, questions about threat assessment activities were included in the state's Annual School Safety Audit Survey completed by school administrators. This report is a technical supplement to the 2015School Safety Audit Report. Threats are broadly defined as a student's communication or behavior that indicates intent to harm someone. Schools were asked to describe their threat assessment activities and report on up to five threat assessment cases. An important caveat is that this report only concerns student threats that were reported to school authorities and then investigated by the school's threat assessment team. An unknown number of threats may go unreported or are not investigated. Thus, this report refers to student threat cases in which a threat assessment was conducted. This report describes the student threat assessment process in Virginia public schools, with information on the prevalence of threats across school levels, the kinds of threats made by students, how schools responded to threats, and the outcomes for students and their intended victims. Schools reported cases involving threats to harm self as well as threats to harm others, but the primary focus of this report is on threats to harm others. This report is a descriptive summary of survey findings that does not attempt to reach final conclusions or recommendations about threat assessment practice in Virginia schools. Additional reports will present more comprehensive analyses that lead to specific conclusions and recommendations.

Cornell, D.G., Maeng, J., Huang, F., Shukla, K., & Konold, T. (2018). Racial/ethnic parity in disciplinary consequences using student threat assessment. *School Psychology Review*, *47*(2), 183–195. https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-2017-0030.V47-2

School psychologists are frequently called upon to assess students who have made verbal or behavioral threats of violence against others, a practice commonly known as threat assessment. One critical issue is whether the outcomes of a threat assessment generate the kind of racial disparities widely observed in school disciplinary practices. In 2013, Virginia became the first state to mandate threat assessment teams in all public schools. This study examined the disciplinary consequences for 1,836 students who received a threat assessment in 779 Virginia elementary, middle, and high schools during the 2014–2015 school year. Multilevel logistic regression models found no disparities among Black, Hispanic, and White students in out-of-school suspensions, school transfers, or legal actions. The most consistent predictors of disciplinary consequences were the student's possession of a weapon and the team classification of the threat as serious. We discuss possible explanations for the absence of racial/ethnic disparities in threat assessment outcomes and cautiously suggest that the threat assessment process may reflect a generalizable pathway for achieving parity in school discipline.

Cornell, D.G., Sheras, P., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2009). A retrospective study of school safety conditions in high schools using the Virginia threat assessment guidelines versus alternative approaches. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *24*(2), 119–129. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016182

Threat assessment has been widely recommended as a violence prevention approach for schools, but there are few empirical studies of its use. This nonexperimental study of 280 Virginia public high schools compared 95 high schools using the Virginia threat assessment guidelines (Cornell

& Sheras, 2006), 131 following other (i.e., locally developed) threat assessment procedures, and 54 not using a threat assessment approach. A survey of 9th grade students in each school obtained measures of student victimization, willingness to seek help for bullying and threats of violence, and perceptions of the school climate as caring and supportive. Students in schools using the Virginia threat assessment guidelines reported less bullying, greater willingness to seek help, and more positive perceptions of the school climate than students in either of the other 2 groups of schools. In addition, schools using the Virginia guidelines had fewer long-term suspensions than schools using other threat assessment approaches. These group differences could not be attributed to school size, minority composition or socioeconomic status of the student body, neighborhood violent crime, or the extent of security measures in the schools. Implications for threat assessment practice and research are discussed.

Cornell, D. G., Sheras, P. L., Kaplan, S., McConville, D., Douglass, J., Elkon, A., McKnight, L., Branson, C., & Cole, J. (2004). Guidelines for student threat assessment: Field-test findings. *School Psychology Review*, *33*(4), 527–546

A demonstration project was conducted to field-test guidelines for schools to use in responding to student threats of violence. Results from 188 student threats occurring in 35 schools over the course of one school year are described. School-based teams used a decision-tree model to evaluate the seriousness of a threat and take appropriate action to reduce the threat of violence. Using threat assessment guidelines, the majority of cases (70%) were resolved quickly as transient threats. More serious cases, termed substantive threats (30%), required a more extensive evaluation and intervention plan. Follow-up interviews with school principals revealed that almost all students were able to continue in school or return to school after a brief suspension. Only 3 students were expelled, and none of the threatened acts of violence were carried out. These findings indicate that student threat assessment is a feasible, practical approach for schools that merits more extensive study.

Cornell, D. G., & Stohlman, S. (2020). Violence in Schools. In R. Geffner, V. Vieth, V. Vaughan-Eden, A. Rosenbaum, L. K. Hamberger, & J. White (Eds.), *Handbook of Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan* (pp. 1–21). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62122-7_40-1

This chapter examines the nature and scope of violence in schools ranging from school shootings to bullying and harassment. Although school shootings have understandably aroused great public concern, an examination of school safety statistics from multiple sources shows that students are much safer from serious violent crime in schools than in other locations. The fear of school shootings has led many schools to adopt policies and practices such as excessive security measures and widespread use of zero tolerance discipline that have deleterious effects. However, students are subjected to high levels of peer aggression at school in the form of bullying and harassment that can have negative effects on their mental health and well-being. The chapter reviews major strategies to prevent violence and aggression in schools, noting the lack of supporting evidence for reactive approaches such as security measures and the substantial body of evidence supporting proactive approaches such as anti-bullying and social-

emotional learning programs and the use of school threat assessment. The chapter concludes with policy recommendations for preventing school violence drawn from a widely endorsed eight-point plan to prevent gun violence in schools and communities. These recommendations emphasize implementing proactive, rather than reactive, intervention strategies to prevent violence and aggression in schools.

Cornell, D.G. & Williams, F. (2012). *Student Threat Assessment as a Strategy to Reduce School Violence*. Handbook of School Violence and School Safety. https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203841372.ch37

The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines were developed in response to studies by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Secret Service, and U.S. Department of Education that recommended schools should adopt a threat assessment approach to prevent targeted violence. This chapter describes the composition of threat assessment teams and the procedures they follow to investigate and resolve student threats. Three case examples illustrate how the guidelines can be used to address student conflicts and problems without resorting to zero tolerance disciplinary practices. The chapter concludes with a summary of four studies supporting use of the guidelines and identifies directions for future study.

Ellington, B. L. (2019). *Preventing targeted school violence using a threat assessment model: An exploration of school counselors' prevention and intervention practices* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. North Carolina State University.

After an incident of targeted school violence at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018, the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) released an operational guide, *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence* (2018), with the intention of providing another tool to enhance school safety. Moving from a reactive response to a more preventive approach is critical to implement the threat assessment process detailed within the U.S. Secret Service model. School counselors take on significant leadership roles in and after school shootings due to their expertise (Fein, Carlisle, & Isaacson, 2008). However, proactive targeted violence prevention efforts also align with the roles and responsibilities of school counselors. The purpose of the present study was to explore professional school counselors' prevention and intervention practices related to student threats of violence, including challenges and recommendations for a thorough threat assessment process in schools. Consensual qualitative research (CQR) was the methodological approach for examining the use of threat assessment in schools. Individual interviews were conducted with eleven professional school counselors from a large southeastern school district. The present study was designed to answer four research questions pertaining to the (1) roles and responsibilities of school counselors in a comprehensive targeted school violence prevention plan, and how schools may (2) identify students who might be at risk for violence, (3) assess a student's risk for violence, and (4) manage a student's risk for violence. Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) was the methodological approach employed for collecting and analyzing individual interview data. Data was analyzed using qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 12.

Findings suggest schools are attempting to design systems and structures in which to conduct threat assessments on student threats of violence in the attempt to prevent incidents of targeted school violence. Yet, inconsistencies as well as challenges to roles and responsibilities, threat assessment practices, and risk management strategies indicate a need for further exploration and analysis. Thus, future studies that further investigate the school threat assessment process are warranted to inform targeted violence prevention efforts in schools.

Federal Commission on School Safety (2018). Final report of the Federal Commission on School Safety. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/documents/school-safety/school-safety-report.pdf

The efforts of the Federal Commission on School Safety have been guided by the need to promote state and local solutions to school violence. To that end, the Commission conducted field visits, listening sessions, and meetings with hundreds of Americans all across the country. The input of these individuals—state and local policymakers, administrators, principals and teachers, law enforcement and healthcare professionals, students and their families—was critical in identifying best practices and the recommendations contained in this Report. As set forth in the pages that follow, the work of the Commission falls into three broad categories: a) Prevent—preventing school violence; b) Protect and Mitigate—protecting students and teachers and mitigating the effects of violence; and c) Respond and Recover—responding to and recovering from attacks.

Government Accountability Office, K-12 Education: Characteristics of school shootings, GAO-20-455 (Washington, D.C.: June 2020). https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/707469.pdf

In addition to the potential loss of life, school shootings can evoke feelings of profound fear and anxiety that disturb a community's sense of safety and security. Questions have been raised about whether schools' approaches to addressing student behavior are a factor in school shootings. These approaches include discipline that removes the offending students from the classroom or school, and preventative approaches meant to change student behaviors before problems arise. GAO was asked to examine school shootings, including the link between discipline and shootings. This report examines 1) the characteristics of school shootings and affected schools, and 2) what is known about the link between discipline and school shootings. To do so, GAO analyzed data on school shootings and school characteristics for school years 2009-10 through 2018-19; and conducted a literature review to identify empirical research from 2009 to 2019 that examined discipline approaches in school, and the effects of these approaches on outcomes of school gun violence, school violence, or school safety. GAO also interviewed selected researchers to gather perspectives about challenges and limitations in conducting research on school discipline and school shootings.

JustChildren and Cornell, D. (2013). *Prevention v. punishment: Threat assessment, school suspensions, and racial disparities*. Retrieved from: https://www.justice4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/UVA-and-JustChildren-Report-Prevention-v.-Punishment.pdf

Racial disparities in school discipline today are troubling. Nationally, nearly one third of black male high school and middle school students undergo suspension, while only one in ten white males are suspended. In Virginia, black males are suspended at approximately twice the rate of white males in elementary, middle, and high schools. Black females are suspended at more than twice the rate of white females. There are racial disparities even when controlling for a variety of other factors, such as poverty and delinquency. Because suspension is linked to school dropout and delinquency, reducing disparities in suspension rates could help reduce school dropout and delinquency rates for all students, but especially for black males. This report presents new evidence that the implementation of Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG) in Virginia public schools is associated with marked reductions in both short-term and long-term school suspensions. Furthermore, use of VSTAG is associated with reductions in the racial disparity in long-term suspensions. Schools using VSTAG have substantially lower rates of school suspensions, especially among black males, who tend to have the highest suspension rates. In 2013, Virginia became the first state in the country to mandate the formation of threat assessment teams in all its schools. In light of this new data, it is important for schools to take this mandate seriously. In order to reap the benefits of threat assessment, however, it must be carefully implemented and balanced with student rights, all with the goal of improving school safety and climate for everyone. In addition to the seven recommendations found at the end of this report discussing ways for schools and communities to implement threat assessment safely and fairly, we also make the following policy recommendations:1. The Virginia General Assembly should ensure that sufficient funding is available to provide school employees and law enforcement employees assigned to work in schools training in threat assessment, as well as other interventions that can help reduce suspension rates and improve student behavior. 2. The Virginia Department of Education and The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services should draft a model memorandum of understanding between schools and law enforcement for implementing threat assessment procedures and related efforts to maintain school safety.3. The Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice should collect data on school-based arrests, referrals to law enforcement by schools or school resource officers, and filing of delinquency petitions or criminal complaints based on conduct occurring at school. 4. The General Assembly should require that schools ensure that students who are suspended or expelled continue to make academic progress during periods of disciplinary removal.

Kaplan, S. G., & Cornell, D. G. (2005). Threats of violence by students in special education. *Behavioral Disorders*, *31*(1), 107–119. https://doi.org/10.1177/019874290503100102

We compared threats of violence made by K–12 students in special education (120 cases) or general education (136 cases) in schools that were implementing threat assessment guidelines for managing student threats of violence (Cornell, Sheras, Kaplan, McConville, Posey, Levy- Elkon, et al., 2004; Cornell & Sheras, in press). Students in special education made disproportionately more threats, as well as more severe threats, than peers in general education. Students classified as emotionally disturbed (ED) exhibited the highest threat rates. Nevertheless, use of school

suspension as a disciplinary consequence for threats was consistent for students in special and general education, and few students were expelled. Our findings support the use of threat assessment to manage threats of violence by students in special education.

Kelly, M. & McBride, A. (Eds). (2020). *Safe passage: A guide for addressing school violence.* APA Publishing. https://www.appi.org/Safe_Passage

Safe Passage: A Guide to Addressing School Violence offers expert perspectives and guidance in understanding, assessing, and addressing school violence. Although the book is designed for child and adolescent forensic psychiatrists and psychologists seeking proficiency in youth violence risk assessment, educators, school administrators, mental health clinicians, other health care professionals who work with children, and interested laypersons will also find the book both practical and illuminating. The editors' approach to school violence is informed by their educational, scholarly, clinical, and forensic work with children and adults who have been disenfranchised through the cumulative effects of poverty, trauma, untreated mental illness, and inadequate access to education. This background has fostered a sensitivity to and understanding of critically important developmental factors that can be passed on generationally, which are explored in depth in the volume. Case vignettes and follow-ups are used liberally to illustrate and illuminate the range of violent situations (e.g., bullying, cyberbullying, gang violence, sexual violence) likely to be encountered, as well as the advantages and disadvantages inherent in various interventions. The authors stress that threat assessment must take individual, school, and community variables into account, a complex but necessary task for mental health professionals and educators who wish to safeguard individuals and society from harm.

Louvar Reeves, M. A., & Brock, S. E. (2018). School behavioral threat assessment and management. *Contemporary School Psychology*, *22*(2), 148–162. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-017-0158-6

While schools are safer today than in years past, one act of school violence is one too many. Recent reports have conveyed the importance of schools developing and implementing protocols and procedures to prevent or mitigate school violence. To assist with this task, this article addresses behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) in the K-12 school setting and the school psychologist's role in risk and threat assessment. Best practices in establishing a K-12 behavioral threat assessment and management process, including the assessment of risk factors and warning signs, identification of concerns, and follow-up interventions and monitoring are discussed. Ethical and legal considerations are also reviewed.

Maeng, J. L., Cornell, D., & Huang, F. (2019). Student threat assessment as an alternative to exclusionary discipline. *Journal of School Violence*, https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2019.1707682

Threat assessment has been proposed as a method for schools to respond to student threats of violence that does not rely on exclusionary discipline practices (e.g., suspension, transfer,

expulsion, arrest). The present study compared disciplinary consequences for 657 students in 260 schools using the Comprehensive Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) with a comparison group of 661 students in 267 schools using a more general threat assessment approach. The odds that students receiving a threat assessment in CSTAG schools would receive a suspension ($OR = 0.59$) or law enforcement action ($OR = 0.47$) were less than those in schools using a general approach. Students in CSTAG schools were expelled at lower rates (0% versus 1.7%) than students in comparison schools. These results indicate that schools using the CSTAG model are less likely to respond to student threats with exclusionary discipline.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission. (2019). Report submitted to the Governor, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Senate President. Retrieved from http:www.fdle.state.fl.us/MSDHS/msd-Report-2-Public-Version.pdf

On March 9, 2018, Governor Rick Scott signed the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act (MSDHSPSA) into law. This comprehensive legislation focused on identifying and addressing issues surrounding the tragedy that occurred at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. A key component of the legislation was the establishment of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission (Commission), composed of 16 voting members and four non-voting members appointed by the Governor, Speaker of the House, Senate President or specified in legislation. The Commission was formed to specifically analyze information from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting and other mass violence incidents, and provide recommendations and system improvements to help mitigate the impacts from and prevent future school shootings. Members of the Commission were appointed to provide a broad and diverse range of expertise and knowledge. Commission members represent state and local law enforcement, mental health professionals, state and local elected officials, educators, school officials and parents of victims.

Mongan, P., & Walker, R. (2012). "The road to hell is paved with good intentions": A historical, theoretical, and legal analysis of zero-tolerance weapons policies in American schools. *Preventing School Failure*, *56*(4), 232–240. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2011.654366

With the passing of the Gun Free School Act of 1994, the 1990s bore witness to the birth of zero-tolerance policies. During the remainder of that decade, several school shootings occurred that solidified zero-tolerance in schools across the United States. With the possibility of threats constantly increasing, school personnel having a thorough understanding of these policies is critical. In this article, the authors analyze the theoretical, empirical, and legal underpinnings of zero-tolerance weapons policies, then argue that these policies are theoretically unsound, are empirically unsupported, and fall prey to several legal critiques. Last, the authors offer recommendations for principals and teachers that would address problems with mens rea and show the value of using threat assessment tools.

Musu, L., Zhang, A., Wang, K., Zhang, J., & Oudekerk, B.A. (2019). *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2018* (NCES 2019-047/NCJ 252571). National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019047.pdf

This report is the 21st in a series of annual publications produced jointly by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), in the U.S. Department of Education, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in the U.S. Department of Justice. This report presents the most recent data available on school crime and student safety. The indicators in this report are based on information drawn from a variety of data sources, including national surveys of students, teachers, principals, and postsecondary institutions. Sources include results from the School-Associated Violent Death Surveillance System, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); the National Vital Statistics System, sponsored by CDC; the National Crime Victimization Survey and School Crime Supplement to that survey, sponsored by BJS and NCES, respectively; the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, sponsored by CDC; the Schools and Staffing Survey, National Teacher and Principal Survey, School Survey on Crime and Safety, Fast Response Survey System, and ED*Facts*, all sponsored by NCES; the Studies of Active Shooter Incidents, sponsored by the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the Campus Safety and Security Survey, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education; and the Monitoring the Future Survey, sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This report covers topics such as victimization, teacher injury, bullying and electronic bullying, school conditions, fights, weapons, availability and student use of drugs and alcohol, student perceptions of personal safety at school, and criminal incidents at postsecondary institutions. Indicators of crime and safety are compared across different population subgroups and over time. Data on crimes that occur away from school are offered as a point of comparison where available.

National Threat Assessment Center. (2019). *Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence.* U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security. https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/usss-analysis-of-targeted-school-violence.pdf

Ensuring the safety of children at school is a responsibility that belongs to everyone, including law enforcement, school staff, mental health practitioners, government officials, and members of the general public. To aid in these efforts, the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) studied 41 incidents of targeted school violence that occurred at K-12 schools in the United States from 2008 to 2017. This report builds on 20 years of NTAC research and guidance in the field of threat assessment by offering an in-depth analysis of the motives, behaviors, and situational factors of the attackers, as well as the tactics, resolutions, and other operationally-relevant details of the attacks. The analysis suggests that many of these tragedies could have been prevented, and supports the importance of schools establishing comprehensive

targeted violence prevention programs as recommended by the Secret Service in Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence.1 This approach is intended to identify students of concern, assess their risk for engaging in violence or other harmful activities, and implement intervention strategies to manage that risk. The threshold for intervention should be low, so that schools can identify students in distress before their behavior escalates to the level of eliciting concerns about safety.

Nekvasil, E. K., & Cornell, D. G. (2015). Student threat assessment associated with safety in middle schools. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, *2*(2), 98–113. https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000038

Authorities in law enforcement and education have recommended the use of threat assessment to prevent violence, but few studies have examined its usefulness in middle schools. This retrospective, quasi-experimental study compared middle schools that use the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (Cornell & Sheras, 2006; N = 166) with schools that either do not use threat assessment (N = 119) or use an alternative model of threat assessment (school- or district-developed; N = 47). Based on school records, schools using the Virginia Guidelines reported lower short-term suspension rates than both groups of schools. According to a statewide school climate survey, schools using the Virginia Guidelines also had fairer discipline and lower levels of student aggressive behaviors, as reported by students. Finally, teachers reported feeling safer in schools using the Virginia Guidelines, as opposed to both groups of schools. Additional analyses of school records found that the number of years a school used the Virginia Guidelines was associated with lower long-term suspension rates, student reports of fairer discipline, and lower levels of student aggressive behaviors. All analyses controlled for school size, minority composition, and socioeconomic status of the student body. These findings suggest that use of a threat assessment approach to violence prevention is associated with lower levels of student aggression and a more positive school climate.

Oksanen, A., Kaltiala-Heino, R., Holkeri, E., & Lindberg, N. (2015). School shooting threats as a national phenomenon: Comparison of police reports and psychiatric reports in Finland. *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology & Crime Prevention*, *16*(2), 145–159. https://doi.org/10.1080/14043858.2015.1101823

In aftermath of the school shootings in Finland (2007 and 2008), hundreds of schools were threatened with similar acts. These threats of homicidal violence occupied both police and psychiatrists, but little is known about the potential threat these cases posed. Our study compared the threats of homicidal violence communicated by pupils aged 12–18 using both police reports ($n = 20$, 2010) and psychiatric reports ($n = 77$, 2007–2009). We provide both descriptive information about the cases and statistical comparison based on threat assessment. The pupils were on average 14.9 years old, 13% girls. The threats were communicated most commonly in face-to-face situations in school to other pupils or teachers. Mental health problems were prevalent according to both data-sets. Pupils who were sent for adolescent psychiatric evaluation were a riskier group than the group who were only interrogated by the police. Police reports lacked specific information reflecting the fact that in 2010 Finnish police had not adopted tools

for structural risk assessment that were already used by Finnish psychiatry. Our results underline the benefits of structural threat assessment approach, which saves resources and helps experts working with adolescents to gather relevant information and systematically assess it. In addition, it would be important to establish proper collaboration between schools, police and psychiatry.

O'Malley, M. D., Wolf-Prusan, L., Lima Rodriguez, C., Xiong, R., & Swarts, M. R. (2019). Cultural-competence considerations for contemporary school-based threat assessment. *Psychology in the Schools*, *56*(2), 255–275. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22197

Threat-assessment procedures are advanced for their utility in reducing racial disparities in punitive and exclusionary school discipline outcomes. Generally unexamined, however, is bias in who gets referred for school-based threat assessment and under what circumstances. Cultural-competence considerations hold promise for addressing sources of bias in the evaluation of threats made in the school setting. Using a quantitative approach, this systematic literature review examines the degree to which contemporary cultural-competence considerations are embedded in 24 school-based threat-assessment articles published between 2007 and 2017. Results indicate generally poor coverage of considerations for cultural competence both within and across threat-assessment articles. An analysis of change in cultural-competence considerations by year of publication suggests that more recently published threat-assessment literature has generally not integrated concurrent advancements in concepts of cultural competence. Preliminary guidance for incorporating contemporary cultural-competence considerations into school-based threat-assessment procedures are provided.

Rappaport, N., Gansner, M., & Flaherty, L. T. (2019). How can schools assess threats without alienating students and families? *Educational Leadership, 77*(2), 14-20

Despite the development of these guidelines and a national focus on school shootings and school safety, however, little data exist on the outcomes of safety assessments—particularly for students who undergo the process. Throughout 19 years of conducting and supervising school safety assessments, authors Lois and Nancy have observed that many of the students who undergo these assessments have complex social and psychological problems, including impulsivity with untreated ADHD and family trauma (Rappaport et al., 2015). Moreover, these students' guardians often felt "attacked" by the school in terms of how the assessment unfolded. Despite being referred to various mental health services, families often didn't end up accessing the intensive services necessary to ameliorate the complex problems that seemed to be at the root of their child's behavior.

Stader, D. L. (2001). Responding to student threats: Legal and procedural guidelines for high school principals. *Clearing House*, *74*(4), 221. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098650109599196

The safe schools issue is a politically charged quagmire that arouses strong emotions. Addressing student rights within the milieu is one of the more difficult challenges facing school principals.

Balancing student rights with emotion becomes especially difficult when principals are faced with student threats. To make matters more difficult, legal challenges to administrative responses to student threats are always a possibility. Such challenges typically cite First Amendment (freedom of expression) and/or Fourteenth Amendment (due process) violations. Therefore, in this article I will focus on some of the legal and procedural guidelines pertaining to freedom of expression and due process in how teachers and administrators handle student verbal or symbolic threats.

Stohlman, S.L., Konold, T., & Cornell, D.   (2020). Evaluation of threat assessment training for school personnel. *Journal of Threat Assessent and Management,* Advance Online Publication. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tam0000142

Despite the widespread use of threat assessment in K–12 schools, there is a dearth of research investigating the staff training process. We evaluated the effectiveness of day-long training on the Comprehensive Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) in a sample of 4,666 multidisciplinary school personnel from administration, law enforcement, mental health, teaching, and other groups. Across 100 workshops conducted by 9 trainers, all discipline groups showed large and statistically significant increases in their knowledge of threat assessment from pretest to posttest. On average, participants achieved threat classification accuracy scores of 75% after completing the workshop. Over 95% of participants provided positive evaluations of the workshop and highly endorsed motivation to implement threat assessment in their schools.

Strong, K., & Cornell, D. (2008). Student threat assessment in Memphis city schools: A descriptive report. *Behavioral Disorders*, *34*(1), 42–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/019874290803400104

Threat assessment has been widely recommended as a violence prevention approach for schools but there are few reports of its implementation. Memphis City Schools adapted the Virginia threat assessment guidelines (Cornell & Sheras, 2006) for use by a centralized team serving 1 94 schools and a student population of 1 18,000. This article describes 209 student threats referred for assessment during a single school year and the resulting educational placements and disciplinary consequences. There were no reports of students carrying out any of the violent threats. These results support further examination of student threat assessment as a promising approach to dealing with student threats.

Wang, K., Chen, Y., Zhang, J., and Oudekerk, B.A. (2020). *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2019* (NCES 2020-063/NCJ 254485). National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020063.pdf

This report is the 22nd in a series of annual publications produced jointly by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), in the U.S. Department of

Education, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in the U.S. Department of Justice. This report is released primarily as a web-based report, and contents of the report can be viewed at https://nces.ed.gov/ programs/crimeindicators/index.asp. This report presents the most recent data available on school crime and student safety. The indicators in this report are based on information drawn from a variety of data sources, including national and international surveys of students, teachers, principals, and postsecondary institutions. Sources include results from the SchoolAssociated Violent Death Surveillance System, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); the National Vital Statistics System, sponsored by CDC; the K-12 School Shooting Database, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense; the National Crime Victimization Survey and School Crime Supplement to that survey, sponsored by BJS and NCES, respectively; the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, sponsored by CDC; the School Survey on Crime and Safety, Fast Response Survey System, EDFacts, and Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11, all sponsored by NCES; the Teaching and Learning International Survey, sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; and the Campus Safety and Security Survey, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The most recent data collection for each indicator varied by survey, from 2016 to 2019. Each data source has an independent sample design, data collection method, and questionnaire design, or is the result of a universe data collection. Findings described in this report with comparative language (e.g., higher, lower, increase, and decrease) are statistically significant at the .05 level. This report covers topics such as victimization, bullying and electronic bullying, school conditions, fights, weapons, availability and student use of drugs and alcohol, student perceptions of personal safety at school, and criminal incidents at postsecondary institutions. Indicators of crime and safety are compared across different population subgroups and over time. Data on crimes that occur away from school are offered as a point of comparison where available.

Weisbrot, D.M. (2020). "The need to see and respond": The role of the child and adolescent psychiatrist in school threat assessment. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists, 59(1).* 20-26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2019.09.001

Child and adolescent psychiatrists are increasingly asked to perform extremely challenging school threat assessments. Clinicians may be reasonably concerned that they are assessing the next school shooter. This Clinical Perspectives builds upon basics of school threat assessment described in a 2008 Clinical Perspectives and decades of personal experience performing threat assessments. Overall, these findings support the use of workshop training to prepare multidisciplinary school-based threat assessment teams.