

School Threat Assessment Practices¹

There is a substantial literature describing procedures and principles for conducting a school threat assessment. We identified 66 publications on school threat assessment practices. These publications address a wide range of topics from general principles to specific procedures for conducting threat assessments in schools. The publications included journal articles (n = 39), government/organization reports (14), books (5), book chapters (7) and other publications (1) published between 2000 and 2020.

The seminal publications on school threat assessment are the FBI's report on school shootings that recommends a threat assessment approach rather than a profiling approach (O'Toole, 2000) and two reports by the U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education that first described findings from their study of school shootings (Vossekuil et al., 2004) and then recommended the use of threat assessment (Fein et al., 2004). Subsequent models of school threat assessment have adopted principles and recommendations from these reports.

There is a wide variation in the comprehensiveness and specificity of threat assessment models. Some publications describe a detailed model of threat assessment that includes procedures for investigating a threat, determining the seriousness or risk level of a threat, and then taking action in response to the threat (e.g., Cameron, 2018; Cornell, 2018; Leuschner et al., 2013; Van Dreal, 2016). Several states have published guidelines or protocols specifically for their schools, often drawing upon the Secret Service reports or other models (e.g., Colorado School Safety Center, 2020; Wisconsin Department of Justice, 2019; Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, 2020). Other publications more narrowly describe a particular instrument for classifying the risk level of a threat (Oksanen et al., 2015; Ryan-Arredondo et al., 2001).

One demonstration of the wide variation in the comprehensiveness of threat assessment guidelines is a study by Penn State researchers who examined the content of 12 school threat assessment publications (Hall et al., 2020). They identified components of each model, such as whether there was a definition of threat assessment, description of the roles of team members, procedures for conducting a threat assessment, and interventions or responses to the threat. The number of components in a model ranged from 8 to 86, with a mean of 39 components.

Most publications describe the rationale for the threat assessment model and how it is implemented. They describe threat assessment as a proactive approach to violence prevention and often mention it as an alternative to more reactive approaches such as zero tolerance discipline. They place threat assessment in the context of other school safety practices and emphasize the need to encourage threat reporting. However, there is little research reporting formal studies testing the effectiveness or outcomes of the threat assessment model. One exception is the body of research conducted with the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG), which was developed at the University of Virginia.² The CSTAG literature includes two field tests (Cornell et al., 2004; Strong & Cornell, 2008) and six controlled studies (Cornell, Allen, & Fan, 2012; Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011; Cornell et al., 2009; JustChildren & Cornell, 2013; Maeng, Cornell, & Huang, 2019; Nekvasil & Cornell, 2015). There are studies of the training process (e.g., Allen, Cornell, Lorek, & Sheras, 2008; Stohlman, Konold, & Cornell, 2020) and how the model has been implemented (Burnette, Datta, & Cornell, 2017; Cornell & Lovegrove, 2015). Another exception is the German NETWASS model, which has studies of training

and implementation (Leuschner et al., 2013; Leuschner et al., 2017). There is a clear need in the field for more studies of different school threat assessment models and practices.

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² This research was conducted by researchers at the University of Virginia, the authors of this document.

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Abstract: School safety has become an important area of concern for school improvement. This study examined the effects of staff training as means of improving school responses to student threats of violence. A multidisciplinary sample of 351 staff from 2 school divisions completed pre-post training surveys as part of a 1-day training program using the Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence (Cornell & Sheras, 2006). Analysis of pre-post surveys found large changes in staff attitudes toward school safety and violence prevention efforts. There was a substantial decrease in concerns about school homicide and increased awareness of effective violence prevention efforts. There was a drop in support for zero tolerance and profiling approaches, along with increased knowledge of threat assessment principles and concepts. These changes were sustained across school divisions serving a challenging urban population and a more affluent, suburban population. Similar effects were found across all school personnel. These findings demonstrate the viability of training staff in a student threat assessment approach.

Amman, M., Bowlin, M., Buckles, L., Burton, K. C., Brunell, K. F., Gibson, K. A., Robins, C. J. (2017). Making prevention a reality: Identifying, assessing, and managing the threat of targeted attacks. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/making-prevention-a-reality.pdf/view>

Traditional law enforcement techniques historically have focused on the apprehension and prosecution of violent offenders 'after' violent crimes are committed. When police are given information that someone may potentially commit a crime or become violent in the future, their responsibilities, authorities, and available investigative tools are suddenly less clear. This guide is about threat assessment and management, or stated another way, 'how law enforcement officers and others may identify, assess, and manage the risk of future, planned violence'. This task is a complex and nuanced one. Published research about intended violence and its perpetrators, along with knowledge and experience derived from previous cases, are applied to the facts and circumstances of each case. In other words, there is a lot to think about. The FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) held a symposium in mid-2015, bringing together academic researchers, mental health experts, and law enforcement practitioners of threat assessment to discuss the active shooter phenomenon. Specifically, symposium participants focused on prevention strategies with regard to this crime problem. By far the most valuable prevention strategy identified was the threat assessment and management team. The good news is that every organization and community has the potential to stand up or access such a team. The intent of this publication is, therefore, to provide desperately needed guidance on making this a reality for every community based upon a consensus of recommendations in an evolving field. Recommendations are offered about this process in very practical terms. It is not intended as an academic textbook but rather as a hands-on guide for novice and experienced threat assessment practitioners alike.

Augustyniak, K. M. (2005). Integration of Federal Bureau of Investigation and United States Secret Service/Department of Education threat assessment models into a conceptual framework for prevention of school violence. *Journal of School Violence*, 4(2), 29–46.
https://doi.org/10.1300/J202v04n02_03

Professionals entered the 21st century with a heightened call to address school safety. Though notable contributions have been made to insure peaceful school communities through a wide range of primary and secondary prevention programs, research suggests that these programs are often an insufficient response to students who are at increased risk for violence. Effective intervention with this subset of youth depends on highly individualized services. This article reviews two empirical justice-based models of threat assessment and expands them with pertinent literature addressing multiple developmental aspects of at-risk youth. The aggregate serves as a cogent structure for examination of individual and systemic factors associated with youth violence.

Borum, R., Cornell, D. G., Modzeleski, W., & Jimerson, S. R. (2010). What can be done about school shootings?: A review of the evidence. *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 27–37.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X09357620>

School shootings have generated great public concern and fostered a widespread impression that schools are unsafe for many students; this article counters those misapprehensions by examining empirical evidence of school and community violence trends and reviewing evidence on best practices for preventing school shootings. Many of the school safety and security measures deployed in response to school shootings have little research support, and strategies such as zero-tolerance discipline and student profiling have been widely criticized as unsound practices. Threat assessment is identified as a promising strategy for violence prevention that merits further study. The article concludes with an overview of the need for schools to develop crisis response plans to prepare for and mitigate such rare events.

Burnette, A. G., Datta, P., & Cornell, D. (2018). The distinction between transient and substantive student threats. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 5(1), 4–20.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000092>

Many schools across North America have adopted student threat assessment as a violence prevention strategy. The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG) is a threat assessment model that emphasizes distinguishing between substantive threats that are serious and transient threats that are not serious. This retrospective study investigated the interrater reliability and criterion-related validity of this distinction in a sample of 844 student threat cases from 339 Virginia public schools. To assess interreliability for the transient versus substantive distinction, research coders independently classified a subsample of 148 narratives, achieving classification agreement with schools of 70% ($\kappa = .53$). Logistic regression analyses examined transient and substantive threat differences in threat characteristics and outcomes. Threats were more likely to be classified as substantive when they included warning behaviors (e.g., history of violence, weapon use, leakage, etc.), were made by older students, mentioned the use of a bomb or a knife, and involved threats to harm self as well as others. Although only 2.5% of threats were attempted, substantive threats were 36 times more likely to be attempted than transient

threats. Substantive threats were more likely to result in out-of-school suspension, change in school placement, and/or legal action. Overall, these findings supported the transient/substantive distinction, but indicated some training needs for school teams.

Burnette, A. G., Huang, F., Maeng, J. L., & Cornell, D. (2019). School threat assessment versus suicide assessment: Statewide prevalence and case characteristics. *Psychology in the Schools, 56*(3), 378–392. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22194>

Threat assessment is a violence prevention strategy used to investigate and respond to threats to harm others. In 2013, Virginia mandated the use of threat assessment teams for threats to self and to others, effectively subsuming suicide assessment with threat assessment and raising questions about the distinction between the two practices. In a statewide sample of 2,861 cases from 926 schools, there were more threats to self (60%) than others (35%), with only 5% involving threats to both self and others. Threats to self were more likely to be made by females (odds ratio [OR] = 3.38) and students with fewer prior disciplinary actions (OR = 0.48). Threats to self were much less likely to involve a weapon (OR = 0.07), but more likely to be attempted (OR = 1.50) and result in mental health services (OR = 2.96). They were much less likely to result in out-of-school suspensions (OR = 0.07), legal action (OR = 0.17), and/or changes in placement (OR = 0.53). Overall, these findings support a clear distinction between suicide and threat assessment.

Burns, M. K., Dean, V. J., & Jacob-Timm, S. (2001). Assessment of violence potential among school children: Beyond profiling. *Psychology in the Schools, 38*(3), 239–247. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.1014>

The increasing level of public attention to violence in American schools makes the issue a top priority among educators. School psychologists could play an important role in identifying at-risk youth, and planning appropriate individual, school, and community interventions related to school violence. However, there is limited literature examining different assessment approaches that could be used to evaluate student risk for violence. This article reviews (a) characteristics of students “at risk” for violence, (b) informal checklists and matching student characteristics to profiles of typical violent students and (c) threat assessment based on Borum et al.’s (1999) model. Ethical and legal considerations are covered as well.

Collins, C. L. (2006). Threat assessment in the post-Columbine public school system: The use of crisis management plans in the public school sector as a means to address and mitigate school gun violence. *International Journal of Educational Advancement, 7*(1), 46–61. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ijea.2150043>

Over the last several years, the use of public relations and crisis management practices has proliferated into areas of American culture far removed from the business world in which it previously solely resided. Along with nonprofit organizations concerned with their social responsibility and higher education institutions attempting to win the student recruitment arms race, public elementary, middle, and secondary schools have begun more aggressively to research and utilize several principles of public

relations in their daily work. Along with edification about image restoration and dealing with activist publics, public school administrators have turned to the public relations field as a resource for best practices when instituting crisis management plans — which address such disparate events as ways to protect students during a severe weather event to evacuation of all personnel during an on-campus hostage situation. In the wake of September 11th and Hurricane Katrina, many school districts reviewed their crisis preparedness plans, instituting changes based on new threats or mistakes made by other institutions suffering through these overwhelming events. These evaluation procedures mimicked the severe reflection sought by school officials after the deadliest years for school violence that ended with the massacre of 12 students and one teacher at Columbine High School in 1999. This area of public school crisis management response has been especially impacted by the infiltration of for-profit sector external relations, relying on business practices to update the precrisis, crisis, and postcrisis measures followed during an act of on-campus gun violence.

Cornell, D. G. (2006). *School violence: Fears versus facts*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

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 multidisciplinary 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 mis-perception 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. (2018). *Comprehensive school threat assessment guidelines: Intervention and support to prevent violence*. Charlottesville, VA: School Threat Assessment Consultants LLC

One of the strengths of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines is our 156-page manual that explains in detail how to conduct a student threat assessment. This manual was based on substantial research, field-testing, and input from education practitioners and experts in violence prevention. With 12 chapters, this manual explains the rationale for threat assessment, how the team functions, and what steps to follow in conducting an assessment. A key feature of the manual is a 5-step decision tree that allows teams to resolve most non-serious, transient threats in 2 steps and then reserves more extensive assessment and intervention for more serious, substantive threats.

The manual covers the mental health assessment of a student who poses a very serious substantive threat, the main pathways to violence that must be considered, and intervention strategies to help troubled students and prevent their conflicts and problems from escalating into violence. The new manual includes a chapter on using the guidelines for threats made by adults such as parents and staff. The manual includes helpful forms for carrying out and documenting a threat assessment and initiating behavior support plans. All forms are freely available for copying.

Cornell, D. G. (2020). Threat assessment as a school violence prevention strategy. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12471>

This paper describes the immense difficulty of predicting that someone is going to carry out a school shooting and then turns to threat assessment as a more promising violence prevention strategy. In schools, a multidisciplinary threat assessment team investigates reported threats and develops responses that are calibrated to the seriousness of the threat and the student's educational needs. Researchers have

found that school teams have been able to resolve thousands of student threats with no serious acts of violence, yet permitting the majority of students to return to school. Controlled studies have found that schools using this approach can have reductions in the use of school suspension and improvements in student and teacher perceptions of school climate.

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., & Datta, P. (2016). Threat Assessment and Violence Prevention. In L. C. Wilson (Ed.), *The Wiley Handbook of the Psychology of Mass Shootings* (pp. 351–371). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119048015.ch19>

Behavioral threat assessment has emerged over the past two decades as a specialized form of risk assessment concerned with the immediate risk posed by an individual who has threatened to commit an act of violence. A typical threat assessment begins when an individual is reported to have threatened to harm someone or engaged in threatening behavior. The shift from an initial assessment phase to an intervention phase depends on the seriousness of the threat and the nature of the underlying problem or conflict. Threat assessment is applied across a wide range of settings and circumstances, and contextual

factors introduce variations in how the method is applied. It has been applied to specialized problems, such as the protection of public figures, acts of terrorism, and domestic violence. Analyses of mass murder cases reveal many opportunities where a threat assessment approach might have been effective.

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. (2018). Statewide implementation of threat assessment in Virginia K-12 schools. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 22(2), 116–124. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-017-0146-x>

In 2013, VA became the first state to mandate the use of threat assessment teams in its K-12 public schools. We provide an account of the development and adaptation of threat assessment as a school safety practice and research on the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines in VA schools. We describe the state law and the question of whether suicide assessment should be considered a form of threat assessment. We then describe research on the statewide implementation of threat assessment and summarize results indicating overall positive outcomes for schools who are actively engaged in threat assessment, but qualitative findings from a needs assessment identified team training gaps as well as a need to orient the larger school community to the threat assessment process. We describe a series of online programs to educate students, parents, teachers, and other school staff about the threat assessment process. In conclusion, this paper presents some lessons learned in the statewide implementation of threat assessment as a safe and effective violence prevention strategy.

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 2015 School 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. L., Burnette, A. G., Jia, Y., Huang, F., Konold, T., Datta, P., Malone, M., & Meyer, P. (2018). Student threat assessment as a standard school safety practice: Results from a statewide implementation study. *School Psychology Quarterly*, *33*(2), 213–222. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000220>

Threat assessment has been widely endorsed as a school safety practice, but there is little research on its implementation. In 2013, Virginia became the first state to mandate student threat assessment in its public schools. The purpose of this study was to examine the statewide implementation of threat assessment and to identify how threat assessment teams distinguish serious from nonserious threats. The sample consisted of 1,865 threat assessment cases reported by 785 elementary, middle, and high schools. Students ranged from pre-K to Grade 12, including 74.4% male, 34.6% receiving special education services, 51.2% White, 30.2% Black, 6.8% Hispanic, and 2.7% Asian. Survey data were collected from school-based teams to measure student demographics, threat characteristics, and assessment results. Logistic regression indicated that threat assessment teams were more likely to identify a threat as serious if it was made by a student above the elementary grades (odds ratio 0.57; 95% lower and upper bound 0.42–0.78), a student receiving special education services (1.27; 1.00–1.60), involved battery (1.61; 1.20–2.15), homicide (1.40; 1.07–1.82), or weapon possession (4.41; 2.80–6.96), or targeted an administrator (3.55; 1.73–7.30). Student race and gender were not significantly associated with a serious threat determination. The odds ratio that a student would attempt to carry out a threat classified as serious was 12.48 (5.15–30.22). These results provide new information on the nature and prevalence of threats in schools using threat assessment that can guide further work to develop this emerging school safety practice.

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. (2006). *Guidelines for responding to student threats of violence*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence is a research-based manual that explains how to form a school team to assess and resolve student threats of violence. It provides detailed instruction for school administrators, psychologists, counselors, and law enforcement officers in a seven-step threat assessment and intervention process. This practical approach helps school personnel understand why a student made a threat and how to address the underlying cause of the threat.

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.

Daniels, J. A. (2002). Assessing threats of school violence: Implications for counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 80(2), 215-218. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2002.tb00185.x>

The author describes important considerations when assessing students' threats made at schools. In a recent article, M. Reddy et al. (2001) presented 4 approaches to assessing the risk of school violence. They submitted important issues and problems with 3 commonly used approaches and suggested a 4th approach as an alternative. Implications for school counselors are explored.

Elbe, C., & Davis Rogers, K. (2019). The Balance of School Safety and IDEA Mandates: Are Threat Assessments the New School to Prison Pipeline for Students with Disabilities? In 2019 Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates' Conference Compendium of Materials. <https://www.copaa.org/page/2019BreakoutIV>

Responses to school violence have historically been reactionary in nature. The Columbine shooting in 1999 was answered with what is now known as zero tolerance discipline policies that included harsh, punitive responses for trivial matters and resulted in the increase of students with disabilities referred to law enforcement. Since then, schools across the nation have seen an increase of law enforcement presence on campus through the increased use of school resource officers and for the first time many students experienced enhanced security measures such as metal detectors, drug-sniffing dogs, locked entrances, and mandated student-worn ID badges. This paper will explore the many and varied responses of federal, state, and local officials to school violence, and the impact of these responses on students with disabilities. Additionally, the authors will discuss in more detail the use of threat assessments and the interplay between these responses and the IDEA, highlighting best practices for school districts and providing advocacy tips for those who advocate for students with disabilities.

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.

Fein, R. A., Vossekuil, B., Pollack, W. S., Borum, R., Modzeleski, W., & Reddy, M. (2004). *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates. Revised*. US Department of Education. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED515943>

Since June 1999, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Secret Service have been working as a team to try to better understand--and ultimately help prevent--school shootings in America. The authors believe the results of this effort have given schools and communities real cause for hope. Through the "Safe School Initiative," staff from the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program and the U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center have found that some school attacks may be preventable. In particular, the "Safe School Initiative" findings indicate that incidents of targeted violence in school were rarely impulsive; that the students who perpetrated these attacks usually planned out the attack in advance--with planning behavior that was oftentimes observable; and that, prior to most attacks, other children knew that the attack was to occur. This document takes these findings one step further by setting forth a process for identifying, assessing, and managing students who may pose a threat of targeted violence in schools. This process--known as threat assessment--was first pioneered by the U.S. Secret Service as a mechanism for investigating threats against the president of the United States and other protected officials. This "Guide" represents a modification of the Secret Service threat assessment process, based upon findings from the "Safe School Initiative." It is intended for use by school personnel, law enforcement officials, and others with protective responsibilities in the nation's schools. This "Guide" includes suggestions for developing a threat assessment team within a school or school district, steps to take when a threat or other information of concern comes to light, consideration about when to involve law enforcement personnel, issues of information sharing, and ideas for creating safe school climates. An appendix provides annotated resources.

Goodrum, S., Evans, M. K., Thompson, A. J., & Woodward, W. (2019). Learning from a failure in threat assessment: 11 questions and not enough answers. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 37(4), 353–371. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2399>

Threat assessment theory and practice have evolved significantly since Columbine. The US Secret Service's guidelines for threat assessment include 11 questions that school officials should ask to identify, investigate, and manage students of concern. Yet, no research examines how school officials implement these questions. This qualitative case study examines the way that school officials used the 11 questions with a student of concern, who underwent a threat assessment and 3 months later shot and killed a classmate and himself on school grounds. The data include deposition testimony from 12 school and district officials and more than 8,000 pages of records in the case. For each of the 11 questions, the findings reveal what the threat assessment team knew and might have learned; the findings also demonstrate the importance of multiple sources of information, a multidisciplinary team, and an investigative mindset. The questions may prove difficult to answer in “loosely coupled” systems, like schools, where information is unintentionally lost due to the organization's structural hierarchy, specialization of tasks, and heavy workloads. The findings provide critical lessons learned for threat assessment, information gathering, and violence prevention in schools.

Goodrum, S., Thompson, A. J., Ward, K. C., & Woodward, W. (2018). A case study on threat assessment: Learning critical lessons to prevent school violence. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 5(3), 121–136. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000104>

This qualitative case study examines the way school officials implemented the U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education’s principles for threat assessment with a specific student of concern, who underwent a threat assessment and later shot and killed a classmate and himself on school grounds. The data came from deposition testimony from 12 school and district staff familiar with the student and the case and more than 8,000 pages of school, district, and law enforcement records. The findings suggest that district and school officials need to monitor the implementation of the threat assessment process with students of concern. Specifically, the threat assessment team should include 4 to 5 members from multidisciplinary perspectives; team members should complete a comprehensive threat assessment training program; threat assessed students should receive regular check-ins and support; and districts and schools should use an empirically validated threat assessment tool. Finally, educators should consider relying on a continuous improvement model to monitor implementation of threat assessment principles and procedures.

Hall, C. M., Bertuccio, R. F., Mazer, T. M., & Tawiah, C. O. (2020). Google it: A component analysis of free online violent threat assessment tools for schools. *The Rural Educator*, 41(1), 40-60. <https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v41i1.680>

Although school-based youth homicides and student fear of attack or harm at school have slowly decreased over the past two decades (Musu-Gillette et al., 2018), students are not free from worry; violence is still present in schools. School violence refers to acts of physical force, harm, or power that occur on school grounds or at school events (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2017; World Health Organization, 2002). School violence is manifested over a vast continuum, encompassing

incidents ranging from bullying and physical fighting to weapon use, bombings, and mass attacks among students (CDC, 2017). While bullying and fighting are much more likely to occur in schools, the nation at large appears to demonstrate greater concern and worry for more unlikely events, such as school shootings (Juvonen, 2001). Because of the mounting evidence related to wide-reaching effects of school violence (Crawford & Burns, 2016; Peguero, Connell, & Hong, 2016), threat assessment efforts to identify serious threats and prevent unnecessary harm are more needed than ever. Educational agencies that are underfunded, lack needed training, and may be geographically isolated, like rural schools, may turn to the internet for free or low-cost resources to retrieve the information and materials that they need to keep students and communities safe. The present study compares extant open-access violence threat assessment measures to Cornell's (2018a) Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG) to examine the relative quality of existing resources that are available online for rural and underserved school districts.

Jimerson, S. R., Brock, S. E., & Cowan, K. C. (2005). *Threat Assessment: An Essential Component of a Comprehensive Safe School Program*. 5.

The second of a three-part series on school violence explores how to identify and help students who may pose a threat to school safety.

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.

Leuschner, V., Bondü, R., Schroer-Hippel, M., Panno, J., Neumetzler, K., Fisch, S., Scholl, J., & Scheithauer, H. (2011). Prevention of homicidal violence in schools in Germany: The Berlin Leaking Project and the Networks Against School Shootings Project (NETWASS). *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2011 (129). <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.387>

Since 1999, Germany has experienced at least twelve serious cases of targeted school violence. This article describes two projects designed to fill the gap between universal prevention and emergency response in preventing severe forms of school violence in Germany. The Berlin Leaking Project examined the viability of preventive efforts based on early identification of leaking behavior that often precedes targeted school attacks. Leaking refers to any behavior or communication that indicates a student is preparing to carry out a violent attack. This would include explicit or implied threats of violence, apparent fascination with prior acts of violence such as Columbine, and any evidence of planning or preparation to carry out an attack. The NETWASS project will test a training program and intervention strategy based on those findings, examining the usefulness of a threat assessment approach to prevent violence by training teachers to recognize leaking behavior by students. This approach is extended by training teachers on a larger scale to identify leaking and then having a school-based team evaluate the student and initiate appropriate interventions, such as mental health services, and in some cases law enforcement action.

Leuschner, V., Fiedler, N., Schultze, M., Ahlig, N., Göbel, K., Sommer, F., Scholl, J., Cornell, D., & Scheithauer, H. (2017). Prevention of targeted school violence by responding to students' psychosocial crises: The NETWASS program. *Child Development*, 88(1), 68–82. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12690>

The standardized, indicated school-based prevention program “Networks Against School Shootings” combines a threat assessment approach with a general model of prevention of emergency situations in schools through early intervention in student psychosocial crises and training teachers to recognize warning signs of targeted school violence. An evaluation study in 98 German schools with 3,473 school staff participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 46.2$ years) used a quasi-experimental comparison group design with three measurement points (pre, post, and 7 months followup) with schools randomly allocated to implementation conditions. The study found increases in teachers' expertise and evaluation skills, enhanced abilities to identify students experiencing a psychosocial crisis, and positive secondary effects (e.g., teacher–student interaction, feelings of safety).

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 (MSDHPSA) 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.

Modzeleski, W., & Randazzo, M. R. (2018). School threat assessment in the USA: Lessons learned from 15 years of teaching and using the federal model to prevent school shootings. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 22(2), 109–115. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-018-0188-8>

This article provides a brief history of the development of the federal model of school threat assessment, which was created by the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education based upon findings from their empirical research on school shootings across the USA. The article reviews the major findings from that behavioral research, which demonstrates how it is possible to prevent

school shootings and other targeted violence in school. The article also describes the components of this evidenced-based federal model and implementation guidance for schools and districts within the USA as well as other countries. The article concludes with the lessons learned by the authors and their colleagues in using the federal school threat assessment model to handle individual school threat cases and in training tens of thousands of other school, law enforcement, and mental health professionals how to use threat assessment to prevent school violence.

Mohandie, K. (2014). Threat assessment in schools. In J. R. Meloy & J. Hoffman (Eds.), *International handbook of threat assessment* (pp. 126– 147). New York, NY: Oxford University Press

Lethal school violence incidents, while not new, became a particular focus of threat assessment professionals in the early 1990s—a concern that continues to the present day. While the United States has been the apparent leader in terms of the phenomenon, noteworthy events have occurred in many countries including Russia, Germany, Finland, England, Canada, China, and Afghanistan. This chapter will outline the fundamentals of school violence threat management: categories of potential perpetrators, evolving patterns of violent offending on campuses, dynamics of violent individuals who target schools, essential threat assessment variables, practical aspects of threat assessment in school environments, interviewing techniques with at-risk subjects, threat assessment teams, and threat management strategies. A short history of noteworthy events traces the evolution of school violence threat management as a contemporary international concern.

National Threat Assessment Center (2018). *Enhancing school safety using a threat assessment model: An operational guide for preventing targeted violence*. U. S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security.
https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/USSS_NTAC_Enhancing_School_Safety_Guide_7.11.18.pdf

When incidents of school violence occur, they leave a profound and lasting impact on the school, the community, and our nation as a whole. Ensuring safe environments for elementary and secondary school students, educators, administrators, and others is essential. This operational guide was developed to provide fundamental direction on how to prevent incidents of targeted school violence, that is, when a student specifically selects a school or a member of the school community for harm. The content in this guide is based on information developed by the U.S. Secret Service, Protective Intelligence and Assessment Division, National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC).

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.

O'Toole, M. (2000). *The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective*. Federal Bureau of Investigation. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED446352>

This monograph presents a systematic procedure for threat assessment and intervention. The model is designed to be used by educators, mental health professionals and law enforcement agencies. Obviously, the same events that led the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) to this subject have also led school administrators and law enforcement officials across the country to consider and develop their own policies and procedures for dealing with threats or acts of violence in schools. This model is offered in the hope that it may help refine and strengthen those efforts. Its fundamental building blocks are the threat assessment standards outlined in Chapter II, which provide a framework for evaluating a spoken, written, and symbolic threat, and the four-pronged assessment approach, which will be described in Chapter III and provides a logical, methodical process to examine the threatener and assess the risk that the threat will be carried out.

Randazzo, M. R., Borum, R., Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Modzeleski, W., & Pollack, W. (2006). Threat assessment in schools: Empirical support and comparison with other approaches. In S. R. Jimerson & M. Furlong (Eds.), *Handbook of school violence and school safety: From research to practice* (p. 147–156). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2006-03632-010>

The vast majority of the nation's students will complete their schooling without ever being touched by school shootings. Nevertheless, some high-profile school attacks carried out by students have shaken the image of schools as reliably safe and secure environments (Fein et al., 2002). A recent study released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2004) notes that between 1991 and 2003 there was a significant increase in the number of students who reported not going to school because they felt too unsafe to attend. Although the U.S. Department of Education (2000) reports that approximately 53 million children attend the nation's 119,000 schools, available statistics indicate that few of these students will fall prey to serious violence in school settings. With respect to school shootings in particular, recent research by the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education found that incidents of such school-based attacks, which we refer to as targeted violence in school, occurred in only 37 schools across the United States between December 1974 and May 2000 (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). We have conceptualized targeted violence as violent incidents where both the perpetrator and target(s) are identified or identifiable prior to the incident (Borum, Fein, Vossekuil, & Berglund, 1999; Fein & Vossekuil, 1998; Fein, Vossekuil, & Holden, 1995). The defining element of targeted violence is that the perpetrator selects a target prior to engaging in the violent incident. In this chapter, we focus specifically on approaches for preventing targeted violence in school--school shootings and other school-based attacks--rather than on other more common and recurring forms of school violence. Compared with the other types of violence and crime that children face both in and outside of school, school-based attacks are extremely rare (Fein et al., 2002; Vossekuil et al., 2002). Nevertheless, to incorporate the necessary lessons from past attacks and ensure a safe environment, it is useful to reflect on two central questions: "Could we have known that these attacks were being planned?" and, if so, "What could we have done to prevent these attacks from occurring?" (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000; Fein et al., 2002; Lawrence, 2000; Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000). This chapter addresses these questions by reviewing available options for evaluating risk of targeted violence in schools. The following sections examine the three assessment approaches currently advocated and used in some jurisdictions for evaluating risk of targeted violence in schools. These are profiling; mental health assessments; and automated decision making, which includes the use of actuarial formulas and expert systems (see Reddy et al., 2001, for a detailed description of each approach). It is not currently known how many schools use which type of assessment and no data yet exist that describe the prevalence of any of these three approaches (or others) schools may currently use, nor of their effectiveness--perceived or actual. An alternative fact-based threat assessment approach, for identifying, evaluating, and managing threats and other inappropriate behaviors is also described (Borum et al., 1999; Fein & Vossekuil, 1998; Fein et al., 1995). After describing the principles of threat assessment, empirical support is presented for its utility among school administrators, law enforcement professionals, mental health professionals, and others to determine the risk of targeted school violence posed by a student who has engaged in threatening or otherwise concerning behavior.

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.

Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2001). Evaluating risk for targeted violence in schools: Comparing risk assessment, threat assessment, and other approaches. *Psychology in the Schools*, 38(2), 157. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.1007>

In the wake of recent school shootings, fear over violence in schools has prompted increased requests for psychologists, educators, and law enforcement professionals to assist in preventing future school violence incidents. We attempt to lay a foundation for developing effective assessment and prevention approaches by first distinguishing planned school-based attacks from other forms of school and youth violence. We then review the three assessment approaches that have been advocated and used in some jurisdictions (profiling, guided professional judgment, automated decision-making) and demonstrate why they are inappropriate—and potentially harmful—in preventing planned school-based attacks. We then describe the contours of the threat assessment approach, developed by the U.S. Secret Service to prevent assassinations, and examine its utility for responding to communications or behaviors of concern that students may present in school settings.

Ryan-Arredondo, K., Renouf, K., Egyed, C., Doxey, M., Dobbins, M., Sanchez, S., & Rakowitz, B. (2001). Threats of violence in schools: The Dallas Independent School District’s Response. *Psychology in the Schools*, 38(2), 185. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.1009>

School violence has become a primary concern for parents, students, school personnel, and the public. As a result, educators are searching for methods to prevent violent acts perpetrated by youth. Dallas Public Schools developed procedures for assessing the potential for violence among children who express intent to harm others. The Dallas Violence Risk Assessment (DVRA) was developed to evaluate students who have made verbal or written threats of violence and to assist school staff in determining appropriate intervention strategies. This article describes the development of the DVRA, and presents case studies utilizing the DVRA procedures. Challenges and implications of the use of the DVRA are also discussed.

Stohlman, S. L., & Cornell, D. G. (2019). An online educational program to increase student understanding of threat assessment. *Journal of School Health*, 89(11), 899–906. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12827>

Threat assessment is a widely recommended practice used by schools to investigate and respond to student threats of violence; however, students are often reluctant to disclose threats. We developed an online educational program for students to increase their understanding of threat assessment and the need to report serious threats. We investigated 2 research questions: (1) How are student characteristics of sex, grade level, and ethnicity/race associated with student knowledge of threat assessment and willingness to report threats? (2) Does the program increase knowledge of threat assessment and willingness to report threats? The sample consisted of 2338 students from 6 middle schools and 3 high schools. Prior to program completion, boys were less willing than girls, and older students were less willing than younger students, to report threats. Post-program questions revealed that the program significantly increased knowledge and willingness to report threats across student groups, with effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) ranging from small (.30) to large (1.43). This program promotes school safety by teaching students about threat assessment and increasing willingness to report threats. The program is available online for other schools to use.

Stohlman, S.L., Konold, T., & Cornell, D. (2020). Evaluation of threat assessment training for school personnel. *Journal of Threat Assessment 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. Overall, these findings support the use of workshop training to prepare multidisciplinary school-based threat assessment teams.

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 194 schools and a student population of 118,000. 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.

Van Dreal, J. (Ed.) (2016). *Assessing student threats: Implementing the Salem-Keizer system, 2nd Edition*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Assessing Student Threats: Implementing the Salem-Keizer System, 2nd Edition is a manual for the application of a threat assessment system that follows the recommendations of the Safe Schools Initiative and the prescriptive outline provided by the FBI. Written from an educator's perspective with contributing authors from Law Enforcement, Public Mental Health, and the District Attorney's office, it contains an introduction to the basic concepts of threat assessment, a review of the research, and an outlined process for the application of a comprehensive, yet expeditious multi-disciplinary system. The book also includes the forms and protocols needed to assess threats, document concerns and interventions, and track the progress of supervision. As extra features, chapters on site security, community safety, domestic violence and teen dating violence, communicating with potential victims, training school resource officers, adult threat assessment, and an adaptation of the system for higher education are included.

Verlinden, S., Hersen, M., & Thomas, J. (2000). Risk factors in school shootings. *Clinical Psychology Review, 20*(1), 3-56. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7358\(99\)00055-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7358(99)00055-0)

Nine incidents of multiple-victim homicide in American secondary schools are examined and common risk factors are identified. The literature dealing with individual, family, social, societal, and situational risk factors for youth violence and aggression is reviewed along with existing risk assessment methods. Checklists of risk factors for serious youth violence and school violence are used in reviewing each school shooting case. Commonalties among the cases and implications for psychologists practicing in clinical and school settings are discussed.

Vossekuil, B., Fein, R., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2004). *The final report and findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf>

Littleton, CO; Springfield, OR; West Paducah, KY; Jonesboro, AR. These communities have become familiar to many Americans as among the locations of those schools where shootings have occurred nationwide in recent years. In the aftermath of these tragic events, educators, law enforcement officials, mental health professionals and parents have pressed for answers to two central questions: "Could we have known that these attacks were being planned?" and, if so, "What could we have done to prevent these attacks from occurring?"