

## ***Keeping Utah Schools Safe with Threat Assessment***

**Governor's Public Safety Summit  
July 27, 2021**

**Dewey Cornell, Ph.D.  
dcornell@schoolta.com**



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**Dewey G. Cornell, Ph. D.**

- Holds the Virgil Ward Chair as Professor of Education in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Virginia.
- Director of the UVA Youth Violence Project

Dr. Cornell became interested in the prevention of youth violence based on his experiences as a forensic clinical psychologist evaluating and treating violent offenders in the 1980s. He led the development of threat assessment guidelines for schools in 2001. Dr. Cornell discloses that he has a financial interest in the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines (CSTAG.)

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### **Threat Assessment is a violence prevention strategy.**

- 1. Identification:** friends, family members, or others seek help when concerned about someone in distress/threatening violence.
- 2. Evaluation:** Threat assessment team evaluates the seriousness of the threat.
- 3. Intervention:** The team initiates assistance to address the underlying problem, conflict or need. In the most serious cases, protective action is taken.

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## **Topics**

- 1. The Big Question**
- 2. School Safety**
- 3. CSTAG Model**
- 4. Training & Implementation**

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## **The Big Question**



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## **How will our kids do in school this fall?**



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## Most kids will do well, but a lot has happened...



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## Most kids will do well, but a lot has happened...

- 600,000+ Covid-related deaths
- 1 in 4 long-haul Covid symptoms
- 14.8% peak unemployment
- 25% increase in homicide
- Increased depression and suicide

<https://health.ucdavis.edu/health-news/newsroom/studies-show-long-haul-covid-19-affects-1-in-4-covid-19-patients-regardless-of-severity/2021/03>  
<https://fas.org/spp/crs/misc/R46554.pdf>  
<https://crime-data-explorer.fr.cloud.gov/pages/home>

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## Stress → Aggression

Stress at home leads to aggression at school.

Schools will continue to see peer conflicts, bullying, and threats.



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## Topics

1. The Big Question
2. School Safety
3. CSTAG Model
4. Training & Implementation

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## School Safety Fears

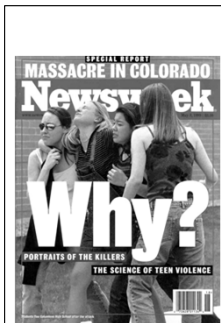
School shootings are so traumatic that they skew perceptions of school safety and convince the public and policymakers that there are dramatic needs for security measures.



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## Why Fear of School Violence Matters

1. School Suspensions
2. School Fortification



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## The Expansion of Zero Tolerance

- From No Guns to
- No Toy Guns
- No Nail clippers
- No Plastic utensils
- No Finger-pointing
- No Jokes
- No Drawings
- No Rubber band shooting
- No Accidental violations

**TIME**

**The Columbine Effect**

It looks like the end of the California year after  
Confronting the classroom code of silence  
Why more kids bring guns—and others don't

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## Zero Tolerance Suspensions

**Boy who held pencil like gun suspended**

School has "zero tolerance" weapons policy

Updated: Thursday, 06 May 2013, 3:54 PM EDT  
Published: Monday, 06 May 2013, 5:33 PM EDT

**Anne McNamara**

SUFFOLK, Va. (WAVY) - A Suffolk school suspended a second grader for pointing a pencil at another student and making gun noises.

Seven-year-old Christopher Marshall says he was playing with another student in class Friday, when the teacher at Driver Elementary asked them to stop pointing pencils at each other.

"When I asked him about it, he said, 'Well I was being a Marine and the other guy was being a bad guy,'" said Paul Marshall, the boy's father. "It's as simple as that."

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August 9, 2006

## Zero Tolerance Policies Are Not as Effective as Thought in Reducing Violence and Promoting Learning in School, Says APA Task Force

Research finds that mandatory discipline can actually increase bad behavior and drop out rates in middle and secondary students

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## Suspension Practices

**Suspension is a practice that has more negative than positive effects on students:**

- Fall behind in their classes
- Feel alienated and rejected
- Continue to misbehave and be suspended
- Drop out of school
- Juvenile court involvement

The school-to-prison pipeline

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## Threat assessment is an alternative to zero tolerance

- Zero tolerance uses punitive discipline for all students regardless of the circumstances or the seriousness of their behavior.
- Threat assessment considers the context and content of the behavior. The student's intentions matter.

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## Fear of School Violence Drives New School Security Industry

Newtown Rampage Spurs \$5 Billion School Security Spending

November 14, 2013 • 10:10 AM EST

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-11-14/schools-boosting-security-spending-after-newtown-massacre>

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## Bullet-Proof Entrances



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## Metal Detectors in Schools



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## Safe Rooms



Students practice entering a bulletproof storm shelter designed by Shelter-in-Place.  
SHELTER-IN-PLACE

<https://www.newsweek.com/oklahoma-schools-storm-shelters-shooting-824328>

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EDUCATION

### Fruitport designs new \$48M high school with places to hide from mass shooters

Fruitport's \$48M high school includes curved hallways and half walls to protect students, teachers, and staff.

<https://www.wxzm13.com/article/news/education/fruitport-designs-new-48m-high-school-with-places-to-hide-from-mass-shooters/69-6eeb154f-7a6e-43bd-b7c5-a360a0b0ce9f>

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## Research on School Security

J Youth Adolescence (2016) 45:195–210  
DOI 10.1007/s10964-015-0245-5

### EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

#### Visible School Security Measures and Student Academic Performance, Attendance, and Postsecondary Aspirations

Emily E. Tanner-Smith · Benjamin W. Fisher

JOURNAL OF YOUTH ADOLESCENCE  
ISSN 1540-5025  
DOI 10.1007/s10964-015-0245-5

School Safety Strategies and Their Effects on the Occurrence of School-Based Violence in U.S. High Schools: An Exploratory Study

Matthew J. Conlisk

Watsonville School of Social Work, Watsonville University, New York, New York, USA



**Metal Detectors and Feeling Safe at School**

Billie Gastie

Education and Urban Society  
45(4):486–498

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DOI 10.1007/s10964-015-0245-5  
<http://www.springer.com>

#### Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management

Structural school safety measures, SRDs, and school-related delinquent behavior and perceptions of safety: A state-of-the-art review

Jennifer M. Reingle Gonzalez, Katelyn K. Jeterina, Wesley G. Jennings

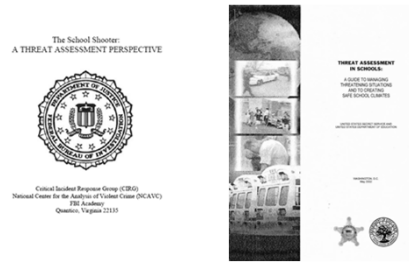
**Little evidence of increased safety. Concerns that students are more anxious.**

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**We should prevent shootings rather than simply prepare for them.**

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### Threat Assessment For Schools



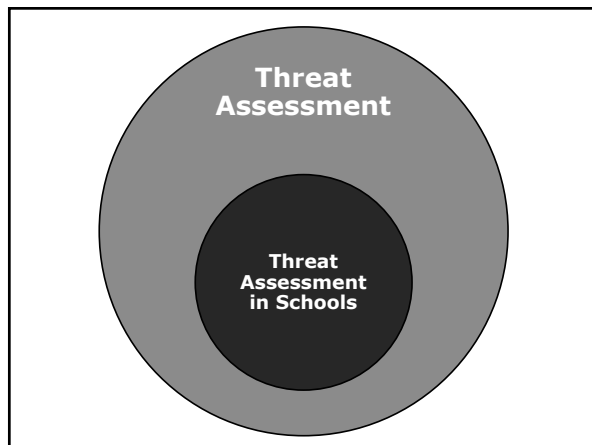
- 2000 FBI report recommending school threat assessment
- 2002 Secret Service and US Dept of Education study and guide on school threat assessment

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### Threat Assessment is a violence prevention strategy.

- 1. Identification:** friends, family members, or others seek help when concerned about someone in distress/threatening violence.
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### School-Based Threat Assessment

1. Compared to adults, students
  - frequently make threats;
  - often engage in fights;
2. Over-reactions to student misbehavior have serious negative consequences.
3. Schools have a duty to educate all students.

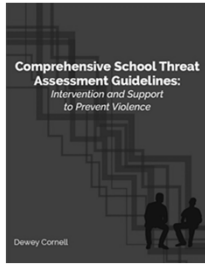
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### Topics

1. The Big Question
2. School Safety
3. CSTAG Model
4. Training & Implementation

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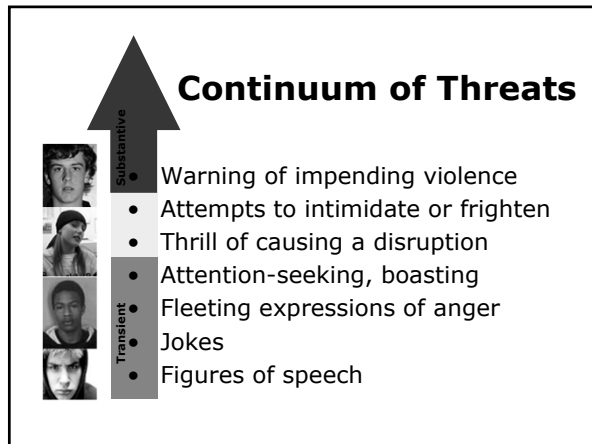
### Virginia Model of School Threat Assessment



- Developed 2001 at University of Virginia
- School-based teams gather information
- Follow decision-tree to determine whether threat is transient or substantive
- Take protective action if substantive
- Attempt to resolve the problem underlying the threat

2018 Manual

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### Accurate Threat Assessment Avoids 2 Errors ...

#### 1. Over-reaction

**School Suspends Second Grader for Eating His Pop-Tart Into the Shape of a Gun**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNTB\\_w\\_d114](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNTB_w_d114) - News report on WAVY TV 10 March 4, 2013.  
<https://gawker.com/5988299/school-suspends-second-grader-for-eating-his-pop-tart-into-the-shape-of-a-gun>

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### Accurate Threat Assessment Avoids 2 Errors ...

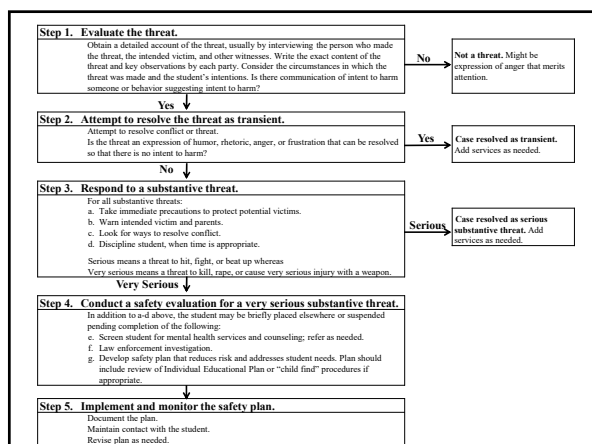
#### 2. Under-Reaction

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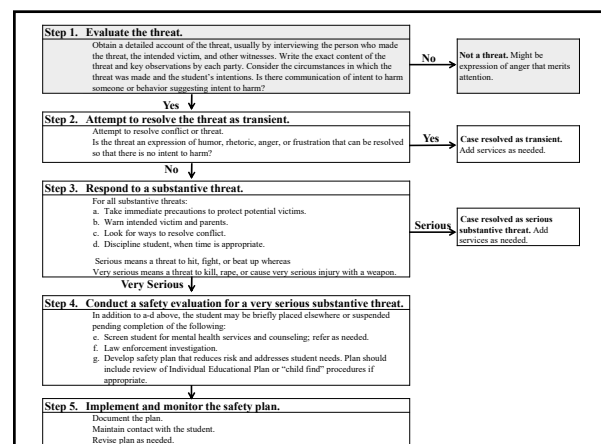
### What is the purpose of school threat assessment?

1. Prevent violence
2. Help troubled students
3. Avoid over-reactions to student misbehavior

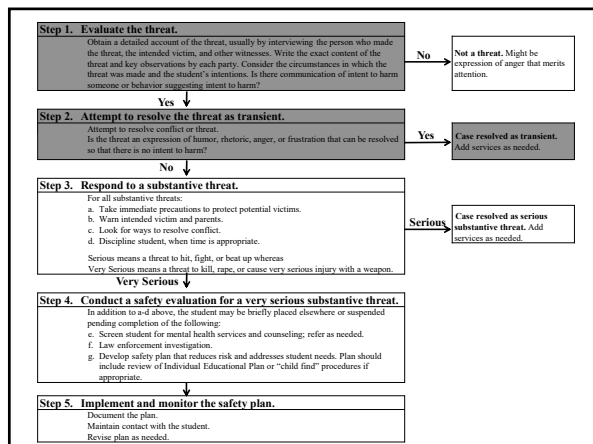
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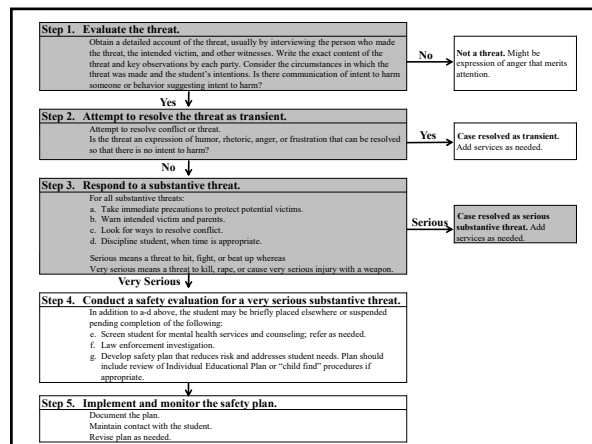
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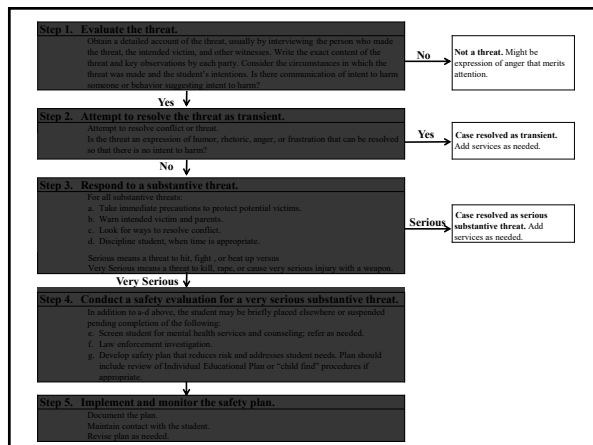
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## Team roles

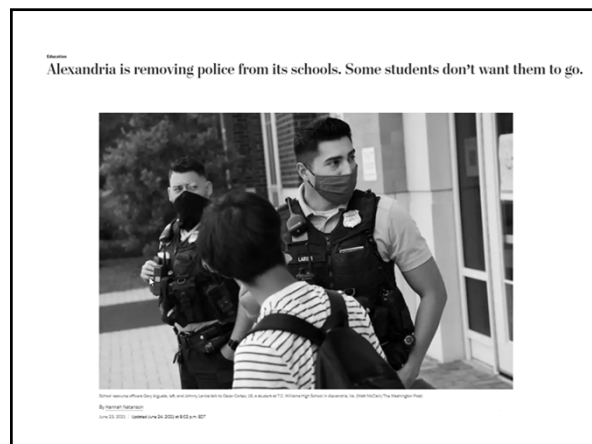
Principal or Assistant Principal	Usually leads team.
School Resource Officer	Advises team, responds to illegal actions and emergencies.
Mental Health Staff (School counselors, psychologists, social workers)	Team member to conduct mental health assessments. Team member to take lead role in follow-up interventions.
Optional team members Teachers, aides, other staff	Report threats, provide input to team.

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

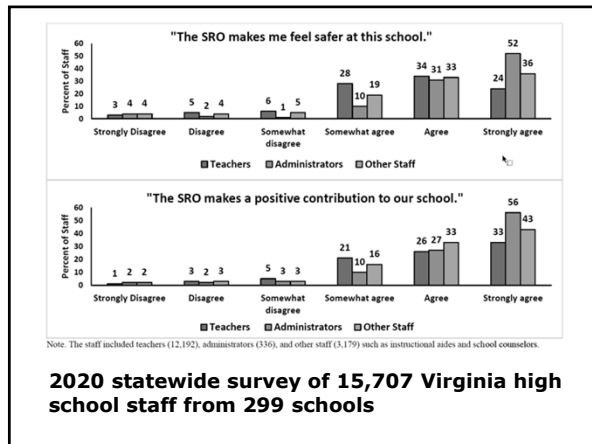
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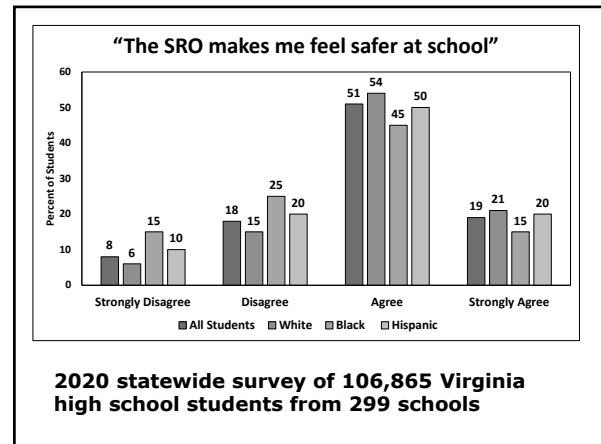
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**NATIONAL POLICE FOUNDATION**  
Advancing Public Safety, Innovation and Justice

**5 things to consider before posting cops in schools**

By John Russell  
President, National Police Foundation

**A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools**

- We must clearly define roles.** School Resource Officers (SROs) have many roles, including teaching, mentoring, and law enforcement. These functions vary by school environment and community needs. But even when the SRO is not acting as a law enforcement officer, it is vital to ensure that the SRO is not acting as a law enforcement officer. This is particularly true when the SRO is acting as a law enforcement officer. This is particularly true when the SRO is acting as a law enforcement officer.
- We need to make sure that we select the most appropriate officers to work in our schools.** Not all officers are created equal. Some officers are better suited to work in schools than others. This is particularly true when the SRO is acting as a law enforcement officer. This is particularly true when the SRO is acting as a law enforcement officer.
- We must make sure the SROs are adequately prepared to do their job.** SROs who work in schools must receive special training to better understand school culture and the problems they face. School Resource Officers (SROs) must receive special training to better understand school culture and the problems they face. School Resource Officers (SROs) must receive special training to better understand school culture and the problems they face.
- We should define going for a longer partnership.** When in the past, the partnership between schools and law enforcement was often based on a short-term partnership. This is no longer the case. The partnership between schools and law enforcement is now a long-term partnership. This is no longer the case. The partnership between schools and law enforcement is now a long-term partnership.
- We must engage community partners.** Posting school cops is the responsibility of more than just the school and law enforcement. It is the responsibility of the entire community. This is no longer the case. The partnership between schools and law enforcement is now a long-term partnership. This is no longer the case. The partnership between schools and law enforcement is now a long-term partnership.

**NASRO** **NASPP** **School Threat Assessment**

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**NATIONAL POLICE FOUNDATION**  
Advancing Public Safety, Innovation and Justice

**5 things to consider before posting cops in schools**

**A Framework**

- 1. Define the SRO role and exclude enforcement of school discipline.**
- 2. Provide specialized SRO training.**
- 3. Work in collaboration with other professionals.**

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**Topics**


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**Journal of Threat Assessment and Management**

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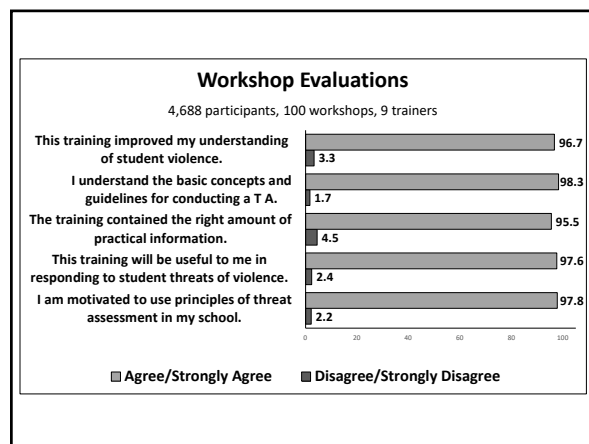
2020, Vol. 7, No. 1-2, 29–40  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tham0000142>

### Evaluation of Threat Assessment Training for School Personnel

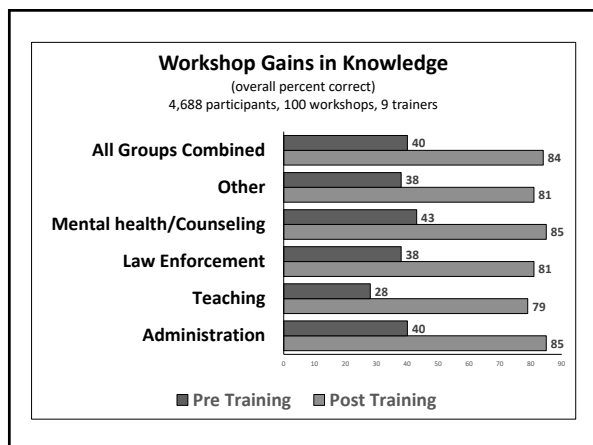
Shelby Stohman, Timothy Konold, and Dewey Cornell  
University of Virginia

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.

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### Threat Assessment in Utah



**School Safety Center (SSC)**

Overview

Effective 5/12/2020  
536-8-802. State Safety and Support Program – State board duties.  
(1) There is created the State Safety and Support Program.  
(2) The state board shall:  
(a) develop in conjunction with the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health model student safety and support policies for an LEA, including:  
(i) evidence-based procedures for the assessment of and intervention with an individual whose behavior poses a threat to school safety;

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### Threat Assessment in Utah



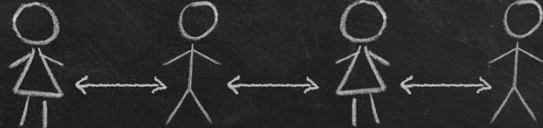
**The Utah State Board of Education selected CSTAG as its evidence-based threat assessment tool.**

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## SOCIAL DISTANCING



**Pandemic Adjustments**

- Online training
- Online case management

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## Blended Learning Program

**Level 1 - Online, asynchronous individual training in threat assessment basics. 3 hours**

**Level 2 - Virtual workshop for teams to practice CSTAG model. 3.5 – 4 hours**

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## Threat Assessment in Utah Online training

**Workshop Evaluations**

100 participants, 2 districts

I found the online training to be engaging and easy to use.	98
This training will be helpful to me in responding to student threats of...	98
I am motivated to use principles of threat assessment in my school.	98

0 20 40 60 80 100

☒ Agree/Strongly Agree    ☐ Disagree/Strongly Disagree

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## Threat Assessment in Utah

I feel very much more prepared to make decisions related to student threats because of this training.

Excellent training. Insightful and extremely educational. Our breakout group consistently talked about how much we learned through the CSTAG training process.

This program is great! The workshop was put together well and was organized in a way that was easy to understand and follow.

CSTAG is restorative at its foundation. It also provides a comprehensive protocol for schools and school administrators to follow to best meet the needs of every student in their schools.

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## Threat Assessment in Utah

...responding to a situation at one of our middle schools....once they gathered all the facts [we] were able to help the school and law enforcement officers understand that what they were dealing with was a transient threat – not a substantive threat - that was easily handled at school.... In the past this situation, and all like it, would have resulted in multiple suspensions, police charges, and an enraged school community. The CSTAG principles ... was a powerful force for reasonableness and calm...we immediately understood the power of what it could mean if ALL of our school administrators were trained in the CSTAG model.

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## Threat Assessment in Utah

...it was clear to the superintendent that this training was critical.... He, along with all district leadership, see CSTAG as "not optional, but essential, critical, and a game changer". ... We have already benefited from the training and know that CSTAG will facilitate a powerful positive cultural change force. ....In my opinion, anyone who works in schools or with any kind of crisis situation, should be trained in CSTAG. ...I imagine a culture in our district in which schools, law enforcement, emergency responders, mental health providers, and chambers of commerce are unified in this understanding and effort.

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## Online Case Management



- 1. Maintain high quality process.**
- 2. Evaluate trends and improve system.**
- 3. Liability protection.**

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## Online case management



1. Efficient records
2. Greater consistency
3. Better fidelity
4. Trend analysis
5. Liability protection

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## Topics

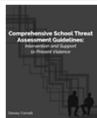
1. School safety
2. CSTAG model
3. Training
4. Implementation

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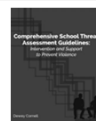
## Research on Threat Assessment



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4. Allen, K., Cornell, D., Lorek, E., & Sheras, P. (2008). Response of school personnel to student threat assessment training. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 19, 319-332.
5. Cornell, D., 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, 119-129.
6. Cornell, D., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2011). Reductions in long-term suspensions following adoption of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines. *Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals*, 95, 175-194.
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10. Burnette, A. G., Datta, P., & Cornell, D. G. (2017). The distinction between transient and substantive student threats. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*. <http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2017-56103-001>
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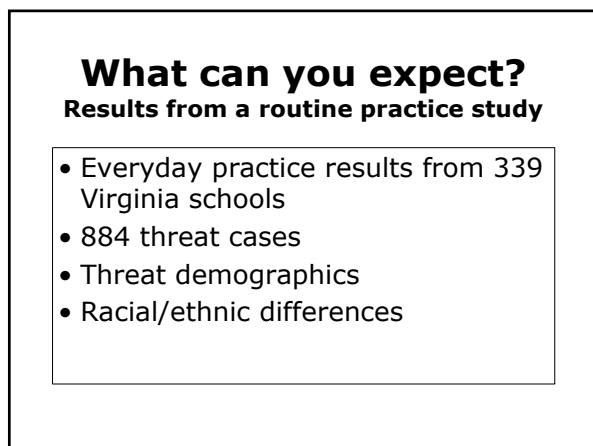
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## Outcome Research

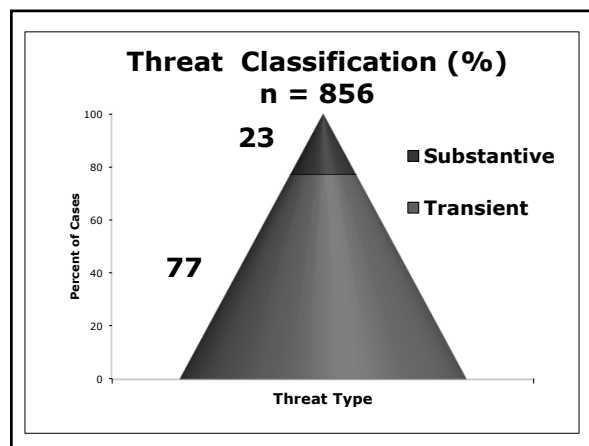


1. 99% of threats not carried out.
2. Only 1% expelled, 1% arrested.
3. Counseling used more often.
4. More positive school climate.
5. No racial disparities in discipline

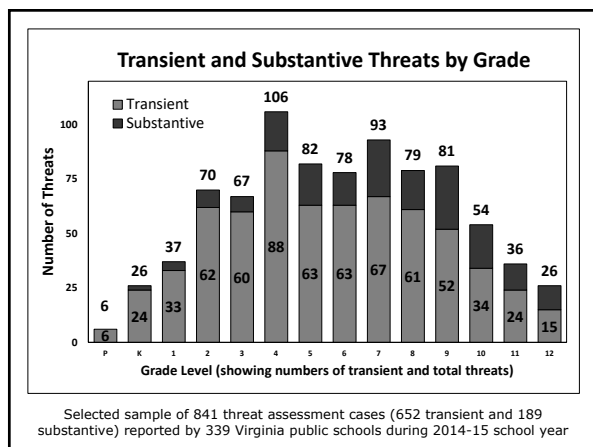
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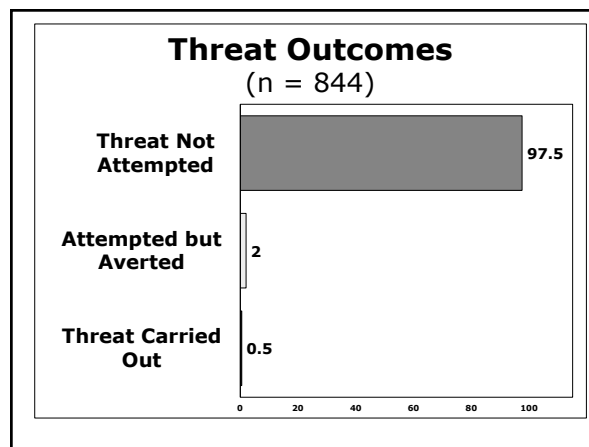
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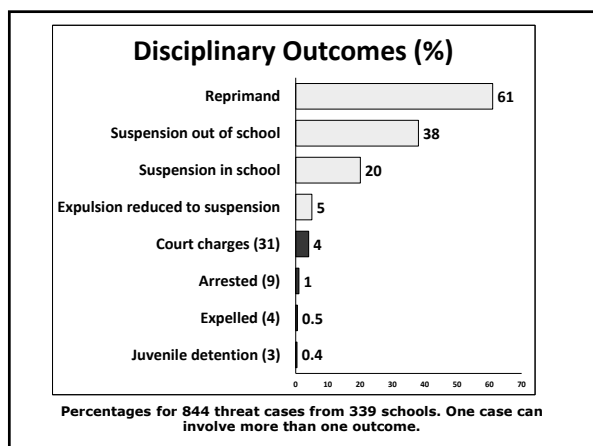
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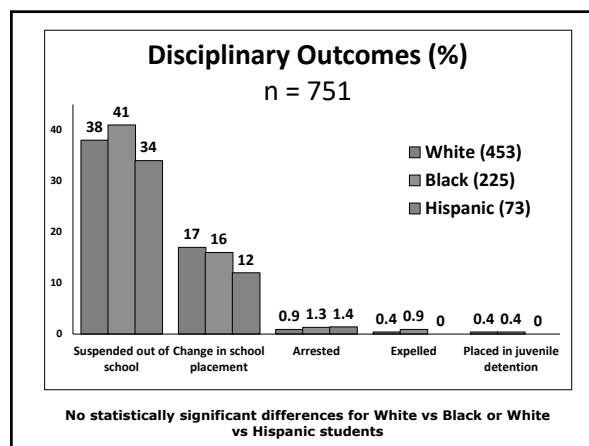
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