

# ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS: School Threat Assessment and Management Model Policies and Procedures



Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services  
Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety  
[www.dcjs.virginia.gov](http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov)

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## Purpose

Since 2013, when the Virginia General Assembly enacted legislation requiring threat assessment teams in public schools, the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS) has provided training, resources, guidance, and technical assistance for school and law enforcement personnel across Virginia. The *Code of Virginia* [§ 22.1-79.4](#) states:

“Each local school board shall adopt policies for the establishment of threat assessment teams, including the assessment of and intervention with individuals whose behavior may pose a threat to the safety of school staff or students **consistent** with the model policies developed by the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (the Center) in accordance with [§ 9.1-184](#).”

The *Code* requires school boards to adopt threat assessment policies to be **consistent** with the model policies developed by VCSCS. The purpose of this *Essential Elements* document is to help school boards and their threat assessment teams gauge their consistency with the model policies, procedures, and guidelines established by *Code*.

## Policies and Structures

Virginia Public Schools shall implement the following policies and structures.

### School Board Policies

The School board has adopted policies for the establishment of threat assessment teams. Such policies:

- Address team responsibilities including the assessment of and intervention with **any** individual whose behavior may pose a threat to the safety of school staff or students.
  - The threat Assessment and management process does not only address students.
- Are consistent with the model policies and procedures developed by the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety.
- Include procedures for referrals to community services boards or health care providers for evaluation or treatment, when appropriate.
- Require all school division employees, volunteers, and contractors to report any expressed threat(s), or behavior(s) that may represent a threat to the community, school, or self.
- Require that, regardless of threat assessment activities, disciplinary action and referral to law enforcement are to occur as required by school board policy and the *Code of Virginia*.

### Threat Assessment Team Structure

The superintendent has established a threat assessment team for each school.

- A threat assessment team may serve one or more schools.
- The team shall engage in the assessment of and intervention with **any** individual whose behavior may pose a threat to the safety of school staff or students.
- Teams shall include persons with expertise in school administration, counseling, instruction, and law enforcement.
  - *Teams may include persons with other areas of expertise.*
- Each threat assessment team has a designated team leader, typically a principal or other administrator for the school(s) covered by the threat assessment team.
- Where resources allow, each core member has a designated backup member.
- All members of the threat assessment team (core and backup members) have completed basic School Threat Assessment Training through DCJS or the equivalent.
  - Team members complete refresher training at least every three years.
  - Team members participate in continuing education in threat assessment related topics through DCJS or their professional disciplines as resources allow.
- Team members work collaboratively with each other, with other school staff, and (as appropriate) with community resources to support the purposes of the team and the safety of the school and its students and staff.
- Unless it is not feasible to do so, all team members should be involved with the ongoing assessment and intervention of individuals whose behavior may pose a threat to the safety of school staff or students.
  - *Team members may participate in team discussions via phone or videoconference, if necessary.*

*Note: Items in italics are encouraged but are optional.*

- Team members shall actively, lawfully, and ethically communicate with each other; with school administrators; and with other school staff who have a need-to-know particular information to support the safety and well-being of the school, students, and staff.
- Team members will communicate with local resources (e.g., staff of community services boards, law enforcement, social services, hospitals, etc.) based on the parties need to know, and to the extent allowed under law.
- Each team shall:
  - Provide guidance to students, faculty, and staff regarding recognition of concerning, aberrant or threatening behavior that may represent a threat to the community, school, or self
  - Identify how and to whom threatening behavior should be reported.
  - Implement school board policies for the assessment of and intervention with individuals whose behavior poses a threat to the safety of school staff or students.
  - Report quantitative data on its activities according to guidance developed by the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety.
- Teams shall follow established procedures for referrals to community services boards or health care providers for evaluation or treatment.

### Divisional Oversight Committee

*The superintendent may establish a divisional committee charged with oversight of threat assessment team(s).*

- *An existing committee may be designated to assume the oversight responsibility.*
- *The oversight committee provides oversight to school level threat assessment teams; ensure that procedures are maintained for effective information sharing between the school division and community mental health and law enforcement agencies; assess the effectiveness of the threat assessment process throughout the school division; and recommend changes to policies and procedures, as needed, to ensure an effective threat assessment process reflecting known best practices.*
- *The Oversight Committee may also serve as a division level threat assessment team for those cases that impact across the school division or where cases surpass the resources or abilities of school threat assessment teams.*
- If established, the committee shall include individuals with expertise in human resources, education, school administration, mental health, and law enforcement.

### Threat Assessments Involving Students

- Upon a preliminary determination that a **student** poses a threat of violence or physical harm to self or others:
  - The threat assessment team shall immediately report its determination to the superintendent or designee.
  - The superintendent or designee shall immediately attempt to notify the student's parent or legal guardian.

*Note: Items in italics are encouraged but are optional.*

- Nothing in this policy shall preclude school division personnel from acting immediately to address an imminent threat.
- Nothing in this policy shall preclude the threat assessment team from notifying the superintendent (or designee) of any individual (other than a student) who poses a threat of violence or physical harm to self or others.

## Procedures

**Virginia Public Schools shall implement the following procedures.**

### Procedures to sustain and enhance a safe, positive, school climate

The school shall establish procedures to sustain and enhance a safe, positive, school climate.

- School staff build positive climates through a range of approaches including supporting and celebrating diversity, role-modeling and engaging in open communication between members of the school community, actively and timely addressing conflicts and working to resolve them, and addressing issues like bullying, bias, and harassment.
- Encourage teachers and staff to build positive, healthy, and trusting relationships with students (and their families). Maintaining professional standards and boundaries with students is foundational to these efforts, and to ensure that relationships are healthy and developmentally appropriate.
- Provide professional development and support for teachers and other school staff to enable them to meet the diverse cognitive, emotional, and social needs of students.
- Encourage staff and students to notice and engage with others that seem withdrawn, isolated, or alienated or are otherwise struggling.
- Encourage climate of caring and concern and break down “codes of silence” by helping staff and students feel empowered to share concerns in a timely manner.
- Help students feel more connected to their classmates and school community to foster a positive school climate.
- Utilize frameworks like school-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) that promote safe, supportive school climates by actively teaching students what appropriate behavior looks like in a variety of settings, and by focusing on recognizing and encouraging good behavior.

### Procedures for identifying and reporting concerning, aberrant, or threatening behaviors

Establish procedures for identifying and reporting concerning, aberrant or threatening behaviors.

- Direct that the School Division Threat Assessment Procedures shall be followed.
- Identify reporting mechanisms and members of the school community to whom Incidents of concerning, aberrant, or threatening behaviors should be reported.
- The Threat Assessment Team ensures that any reporting mechanisms used by the school are kept up to date, work consistently, and are checked on a regular and timely basis.
- Threats of self-harm or suicidal behavior by students, also require compliance with [§ 22.1-272.1](#), *Code of Virginia*, with guidance provided by the Virginia Department of Education regarding suicide prevention and intervention, and with applicable school board policies and regulations.
- For any individual, when threats of self-harm are accompanied by threats to harm others, or an assessment indicates the existence of a threat to others, the threat assessment team shall be notified and take appropriate action to prevent acts of violence. The threat assessment team shall work collaboratively with other entities involved in the case.
- All school division employees, volunteers, and contractors are required to report immediately to the designated school administrator any expression of intent to harm another person, concerning

*Note: Items in italics are encouraged but are optional.*

communications, or concerning or aberrant behaviors that suggest an individual may intend to commit an act of violence, or otherwise need intervention or assistance.

- Anyone who believes that a person or situation poses an imminent threat of serious violence shall immediately notify law enforcement, school security, and school administration, in accordance with school board policies on Critical Incident Response.
- In accordance with [§ 22.1-279.3:1](#), *Code of Virginia* certain threats or other criminal acts require immediate notification to law enforcement. The principal or designee shall immediately report to the local law enforcement agency when any of the following acts, that may constitute a felony, occurs on a school bus, on school property, or at a school-sponsored activity:
  - the assault and battery that results in bodily injury, sexual assault, death, shooting, stabbing, cutting, or wounding of any person, abduction of any person, or stalking of any person.
  - any conduct involving alcohol, marijuana, a controlled substance, imitation controlled substance, or an anabolic steroid, including the theft or attempted theft of student prescription medications.
  - any threats against school personnel.
  - the illegal carrying of a firearm.
  - any illegal conduct involving firebombs, explosive materials or devices, or hoax explosive devices, explosive or incendiary devices, or chemical bombs.
  - any threats or false threats to bomb, made against school personnel or involving school property or school buses.
- The school administrator (principal or designee) shall also immediately report any act noted above that may constitute a felony offense to the parents and/or guardians of any minor student who is alleged to have committed the act and shall report that the incident has been reported to local law enforcement, as required by law. The school administrator shall inform the parents and/or guardians that they may contact local law enforcement for further information.
- *The school administrator may report any other criminal incidents (including misdemeanors) that occur on a school bus, on school property, or at a school-sponsored activity.*

### Procedures for triaging, screening, and assessing

Establish procedures for triaging, screening and assessing incidents of concerning, aberrant, or threatening behavior.

- The threat assessment team leader may designate a subset of team members to triage/screen cases reported to the team.
  - If the team chooses to implement a triage/screening process, at least two members of the threat assessment team will review initial reports of concern.
  - The triage/screening team will consider the nature and level of concern, determine if existing resources and mechanisms are sufficient to address those concerns, or whether the full team should further assess and manage the situation, and initiate any crisis responses, as appropriate.
  - To triage/screen a prospective case as **not** necessary for further review or actions by the full threat assessment team, all members of the triage team must concur that there is no identifiable threat/concern, or that there is a low level of concern regarding issues that are being adequately addressed.
  - Where cases are triaged out, the full team (at the next meeting) will have opportunity to review cases that were triaged out and consider bringing them into the full process, if needed.

*Note: Items in italics are encouraged but are optional.*



- Upon notification of concerning, aberrant or threatening behavior or communications, the threat assessment team determines if an imminent threat appears to exist.
  - If the individual appears to pose an imminent threat of serious violence, the team leader, school administrator (or designee) shall notify law enforcement and take appropriate steps in accordance with School Board policies on Critical Incident Response.
  - If there is no reasonably apparent imminent threat present, or once such an imminent threat is contained, the threat assessment team leader shall ensure that the situation is screened/triaged to determine if the full threat assessment team needs to be involved.
- This triage should include (as necessary and appropriate):
  - Review of the reported concerning, aberrant or threatening behavior or communication.
  - Review of school and other records (to which team members may have lawful access) for any prior history or interventions with the individual(s) involved.
  - Conducting timely and thorough interviews of the person(s) who reported the threat, the recipient(s) or target(s) of the threat, other witnesses who have knowledge of the concerns, and where reasonable, the individual(s) who allegedly engaged in the threatening behavior or communication.
- If it is determined that there is no identifiable threat/concern or that there is a low level of concern (that is being adequately addressed) and the threat assessment team determines that no further assessment, intervention, or monitoring is required at this time:
  - The threat assessment team leader shall ensure that the incident and triage/screening is adequately documented, and the threat assessment team shall maintain the documentation in accordance with School Board policy.
  - If the individual (about whom the report was made) does not pose a threat but may benefit from or needs some other type of assistance, the threat assessment team leader shall ensure that the individual is referred to the appropriate school or community-based resources.
- If it cannot be determined with a reasonable degree of confidence that the case involves no identifiable threat or a low level of concern (that is being adequately addressed), then a more in-depth assessment is conducted by the full threat assessment team.
  - The assessment may include but not be limited to reviews of records; interview and consultation with staff, students or community who know the individual; and interviews of the individual and the target/recipient of the threat(s).
  - Based on information collected, the threat assessment team shall determine strategies to mitigate the threat and provide intervention and assistance to those involved, as needed.
- Upon a preliminary determination that a **student** poses a threat of violence or physical harm to self or others, the threat assessment team shall immediately report its determination to the superintendent or designee.
  - The superintendent or designee shall immediately attempt to notify the student’s parent or legal guardian.
  - *The school may implement a similar procedure when any individual other than a student poses a threat of violence to self or others.*

- Upon a preliminary determination (by the threat assessment team) that an individual: 1) poses a threat of violence to self or others or, 2) exhibits significantly disruptive behavior or, 3) has a need for assistance:
  - Threat assessment team members may request and obtain (from within Virginia) the individual's criminal history record information (of adults and juveniles) and health records.
  - No member of a threat assessment team shall re-disclose any criminal history record information or health information obtained pursuant to this section or otherwise use any record of an individual beyond the purpose for which such disclosure was made to the threat assessment team.
  - The threat assessment team may not maintain the criminal history record printed from the system access terminal, nor may they make copies of it.
  - Juvenile delinquency or criminal history information may not be placed in a student's central educational/scholastic record, unless the school is taking disciplinary action related to the incidents.
  - School staff (including members of the threat assessment team) with a legitimate educational interest may store information about such incidents in records maintained by them and separate from the student's educational/scholastic record.
- In instances where there is a moderate, high, or imminent level of concern, and that requires further intervention to prevent violence or serious harm, the school administrator **shall** notify the parent and/or guardian of any student who is the target/recipient of a threat as well as the parent and/or guardian of any student who engaged in threatening behaviors.

### Procedures for managing, monitoring, and resolving cases

Establish procedures for managing, monitoring, and resolving cases.

- If an individual poses a threat of violence or serious disruption or need for assistance, the threat assessment team shall develop, implement, monitor, and adapt, an individualized plan to intervene with, address, and reduce the threat or other concern.
- The threat assessment team shall assist individual(s) within the school who engage in concerning, aberrant or threatening behavior or communication, and any impacted staff or students, in accessing appropriate school and community-based resources for support and/or further intervention.
- For each case, a member of the threat assessment team shall be designated as a case manager to monitor the status of the individual(s) of concern (in that case) and to notify the threat assessment team of any change in status, response to intervention/referrals, or additional information that would be cause for a re-assessment and changes in intervention strategies.
- The threat assessment team shall maintain documentation in accordance with School Board policy.
  - Updates are to be submitted regularly until the case is resolved and is no longer assessed to pose a threat to the school or its staff or students.
  - Resolution and closure of the case is to be documented in accordance with School Board policy.
  - *Schools may use the sample Threat Assessment and Management Forms that are available on the DCJS website and may be adapted to meet the needs of the school.*

*Note: Items in italics are encouraged but are optional.*