

BJA STOP School Violence Threat Assessment and Technology Reporting Program

Category 1 – State Population – 8.47 million (2017) forecast to 8.48 million (2018)

Commonwealth of Virginia/VA Center for School & Campus Safety

PROGRAM NARRATIVE

Description of the Issue

In 2013, the Virginia General Assembly enacted legislation requiring all public school divisions to establish and operate threat assessment teams (TAT) in support of school safety, becoming the first state in the country to do so. The team's composition must include subject matter experts in counseling, instruction, school administration, and law enforcement. Responsibilities include assessing and intervening with individuals whose behavior poses a threat to the safety of school staff or students. Mandated TATs in Virginia function similarly to crisis intervention teams in that they are expected to make referrals to community service boards or health care providers for evaluation or treatment. Referrals to public safety agencies and other health and human service disciplines may also be needed to intervene with students who may pose a threat of danger to themselves or others.

Virginia law also requires that each TAT report quantitative data on its activities. The data is collected by the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS), which has been conducted annually by the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) since 2014. The instrument by which the VCSCS collects the data is the mandated School Safety Audit Program which surveys schools and school divisions annually. The results of these surveys are published in aggregate annually, including case data on TATs.

As part of the same unfunded 2013 legislation, the Virginia General Assembly also directed the VCSCS to provide schools with a model policy for the establishment of TATs,

including procedures for the assessment of and intervention with individuals whose behavior poses a threat to the safety of school staff or students. Virginia's *Threat Assessment in Virginia Public Schools: Model Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines* were developed in 2014 based on a national literature review on research of threat assessment models. This model is closely aligned with *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*, authored by the United States Secret Service and the United States Department of Education. Despite the requirement to develop policies and collect data, there is no corresponding mandate for any state entity to provide critical training necessary for school personnel to learn about the philosophy and psychology of threat assessment (TA), or how to adhere to the prescribed model and protocols for TATs. Furthermore, school divisions have little, if any, funding to comply with the mandate to create and monitor TATs.

Recognizing the need for TA training, since 2014 VCSCS has offered training in behavioral threat assessment across the Commonwealth to school divisions, institutions of higher learning, and law enforcement. The VCSCS has also offered additional trainings to support TATs such as *Youth Mental Health First Aid*, *K12 Legal Issues Around Threat Assessment*, *Recognition and Reporting of Aberrant Behavior*, and *Disability Awareness for Law Enforcement Officers*. Data collected through the 2017 School Safety Audit, the 2017 Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey, and feedback from school and law enforcement personnel provided DCJS and the VCSCS with valuable information concerning the implementation of the TA approach to violence prevention and challenges for TATs. The information shows:

- Teachers are the lowest represented profession not receiving TA training in the last three years (36%) despite the fact they make up the largest number of TAT members statewide (7,439). Teachers and school peers are more likely to observe concerning behaviors than

family members of active shooters under age 18, according to *A Study of The Pre-Attack Behaviors of Active Shooters in the United States Between 2000 and 2013* (U.S.

Department of Justice, June 2018).

- Only 53% of school staff were aware that their school uses TATs, 2% did not think their school did so, and 45% responded “I don’t know.”
- Nearly two-thirds of schools (1,285, 66%) reported conducting one or more TAs in 2016–2017. These schools conducted a total of 9,238 TAs, most of which involved students currently enrolled at the schools (9,087, 98%). However, over one-third of schools (671 schools, 34%) reported that no TAs were conducted. The inability to collect TA activities in real-time, coupled with confusion about record management, may negatively impact schools’ ability to accurately report TAT activities.
- The schools that reported TAs involving students currently enrolled in their school were asked to identify the type of threat made by the student(s). Half involved threats against self only (suicide, self-harm), 45% involved threats against others only, and 5% involved threats against others and self.
- There were 928 TAs that were classified at the highest threat level at some point in the TA process (imminent/high risk, very serious substantive). In most of these (96%) the threat was ultimately averted (the threat did not occur). Of the 40 high level threat cases where an event occurred, nearly half (18) involved suicide attempts by students.
- When asked about the types of training or technical assistance that would help improve the division’s TA process, divisions most frequently identified additional/continued/annual training, training for new staff/ admin, refresher training and review, case studies and scenarios, and recognition of threats and behavioral red flags.

The ability to offer “in-house” training to entire groups of staff, and the limited time available during the school year to provide off-site training are challenges to the implementation of TATs.

- Divisions were also asked what the biggest challenges were to setting up teams or conducting TAs. Forty-three divisions (33%) identified team coordination, such as managing team member schedules and members’ availability to meet in a timely manner. This data highlights the need to facilitate team development by providing targeted training to entire school divisions.

VCSCS receives requests for support from schools, institutions of higher learning, and law enforcement agencies to implement mandated TA responsibilities. These requests highlight the key challenges facing stakeholders to implementing a behavioral TA approach, to include: difficulty adapting the guidelines to unique characteristics of the division or school, implementing systemic change without division-wide training, high turnover of TAT members, lack of clarity regarding information sharing across divisions and with institutions of higher education, and record management.

Documentation of TA activities and management of TA records is highly inconsistent across the Commonwealth. Further, the school safety survey is conducted annually in September and requires schools to report on TAT activities from the previous school year. Establishing a standardized process of documenting TA activities and the collection of real-time data is critical for school TATs to have a user-friendly and efficient means to document TA activities and to gather the data required by VCSCS. At this time, there is no electronic record management system by which schools can collect data related to their TA activities in a format that conforms to the model policies. A behavioral TA approach represents a cultural paradigm shift from a zero

tolerance approach to a broader understanding of the factors that lead to violence with a focus on the opportunity for intervention. Effective implementation requires extensive training to develop a shared understanding by stakeholders who represent the fields of education, community mental health and law enforcement. There are vital legal issues and privacy protections that must be understood and followed to make certain due processes are in place and interventions for assistance for students that do pose a threat of harm to themselves or others are available. It also requires that school divisions develop procedures and processes that align with guidelines set forth by VCSCS, existing procedures, community partnerships, and resources. Annual turnovers in school administration, counselors, teachers, and school resource officers, result in new staff who are not trained in TA, further challenging the full implementation of TA.

The VCSCS proposes a 36 month project which will improve the ability of schools to identify, assess and intervene with individuals who may pose a risk of targeted violence to the school community and to enhance the ability of TA teams to effectively intervene with individuals who may pose a risk of targeted violence. This project, outlined in the attached timeline, will provide critical training in behavioral TA with a focus on supporting school divisions as they implement the unfunded, but mandated requirement of ensuring that all schools have access to a TA team and that school staff understand their roles and responsibilities in recognizing and reporting aberrant behavior and potential threats. The project will include opportunities for key stakeholders in school divisions, law enforcement and community mental health to identify areas of need within their community and strategize to improve team collaboration and coordination. Through this project, VCSCS will develop an electronic case management tool that incorporates the work flow and TA documentation process, thereby enhancing team coordination, improving the fidelity of implementation of the VCSCS

guidelines, enhancing case management protocols, and increasing the reporting of TA related data.

Program Design and Implementation

This project has two areas of focus: training and the development of a TA case management tool. The VCSCS will offer TA training for all school personnel serving on K12 public school TATs within specifically identified school divisions not currently reporting TA data. This is a change in the current training model that encompasses a statewide approach wherein a wide variety of participants from various school divisions are trained. The VCSCS will collaborate with Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and local school personnel to identify critical capabilities and functionality of a TAT case management system. This collaboration will be used to select a vendor, using a competitive process, to create the case management tool that enhances the ability of schools to document and collect required data in a way that improves efficiency and enhances the functioning of school TATs.

Training: To improve capacity and support sustainability, VCSCS will provide division specific training which will focus on the effective implementation of TA protocols that are consistent with the VCSCS model, that account for the unique characteristics and resources of each division, and that develop the capacity of localities to maintain their own needs for ongoing training.

- VCSCS will provide 36 targeted, one day TA trainings using curriculum created specifically to support Virginia schools in implementing VCSCS model practices. The training will be offered within each of the 8 superintendent regions covering 132 school divisions, targeting the school divisions with the most non-reporting schools. This targeted training will focus on providing the opportunity for central office administrators,

school administrators, teachers, school based mental health service providers and school resource officers to work collaboratively to improve team coordination and enhance and refine the existing practices within their division. The VCSCS program staff will arrange for subject matter experts in the field of behavioral psychology, law enforcement, and law to provide TA related trainings and consultation services to support TATs in a K12 environment.

- VCSCS will offer Train the Trainer opportunities to support the internal capacity of divisions to provide ongoing training to new personnel and to develop a cadre of instructors statewide who will be able to provide support to divisions as they manage the training needs of new school and law enforcement personnel.
- VCSCS will develop and produce an on-line training in TA for teachers and make it available to divisions across the Commonwealth.
- VCSCS will also offer school division teams the opportunity to consult with a subject matter expert around the development and/or enhancement of their TA processes and procedures and on case specific questions.

Case Management Tool: To address the critical need of effectively documenting TA activities and reporting data, VCSCS will consult with VDOE and local school personnel to identify functionality and capabilities of the desired case management tool. This collaboration will drive the selection of a software developer to create an electronic case management system. This tool will:

- support school divisions in developing their processes,
- facilitate the implementation of the VCSCS model procedures with fidelity,
- assist divisions in recording and reporting TAT activities,
- allow for critical information sharing across school divisions and
- improve the team's ability to collaborate on specific cases.

This tool will be a standalone, cloud based module that will have the capacity to sync relevant information with the most popular student record management systems improving team communication, decision-making and case management. Once complete, the module will be made accessible to school divisions across the state and will provide the level of security and compatibility with student management systems that the TA module will require. The tool will conform to the Global Standards Package (GSP) and adhere to the guidance issued by the Office of Justice Programs. Following state procurement guidelines, program staff will seek bids for consultants or companies to develop a cloud based software module. VCSCS will issue a request for proposals with detailed specifications of the data that needs to be collected to meet mandated reporting requirements according to Virginia law and VCSCS research standards. Bidders will be directed to develop a product that will integrate with the student records management systems in use in Virginia school divisions.

Capabilities and Competencies of the Applicant

Created in 2000, the VCSCS is one of the oldest and continually operational school safety centers in the nation. Its legislative mandates and state general funding, combined with extensive research partnerships with the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech, solidify its mission and sustainability. The Center's constituencies include 1,250,000 K-12 students, 132 public school superintendents, 6,000 school administrators, 120,000 teachers and school staff, and 780 School Resource Officers. Since its inception the Center has held over 50 major 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 day conferences on school and campus safety, violent crime, sexual assault, emergency planning, gangs and human trafficking, and school climate. Over 300 unique, standalone trainings offered at least 2,000 times on topics related to school safety and security, school climate, adolescent brain development, youth mental health, and legal issues just to name a few.

By the end of 2018, approximately 75,000 law enforcement officers, school leaders, school security and others from Virginia, plus representatives from nearly every state in the country will have participated in a VCSCS conference or training or utilized a resource created in Virginia. These trainings have brought thousands of the best, brightest speakers and trainers to Virginia at low or no cost to our constituents, allowing participants to gain insight into how to improve their climates and keep their staff, students, and visitors safe. The VCSCS is also part of the DCJS, the State Administering Agency, which manages over 1,100 federal grant programs totaling more than 280 million dollars in direct and pass through funding and is well poised to manage a federal grant.

Donna Michaelis, the VCSCS manager, has been leading the VCSCS since its creation in 2000, has served six Governors, and participated on a myriad of state and national task forces centered on school safety issues. The Project Coordinator and Grant Assistant (to be hired) will supervise, coordinate, and carry out all aspects of the project to ensure the project goals are achieved. They will work in a collaborative manner with the VCSCS and school staff, VDOE, and the outside evaluator to oversee the activities associated with this project. Along with a project coordinator, one training coordinators (Marc Dawkins), a School Safety Specialist (Shellie Evers), and a researcher (Jim McDonough) will work in tandem, along with national, state, and local partners to ensure that grant goals are met.

Plan for Collecting Required Data Required for This Solicitation's Performance Measures

The School Safety Survey currently requests information on TAT processes and details regarding TAs completed at each school. Surveys are also administered at the division level to collect information on policies and protocols directed from the division level. At this time data is collected on the following: positions that are represented on the school TAT, number of TAs

conducted, types of issues that the TAT responded to, and number of cases considered high risk. The survey will be updated to include information required by the grantor to include: number of individuals who received a TA more than once in 90 days, number of schools that start and /or expand or enhance their intervention/ TAT, and number of students who were directly involved in the issue. Case management data will be collected to include amount of time necessary for follow up on cases, referrals to in-school mental health resources as well as referrals to community services boards.

Data on the number and type of trainings offered, attendance at those trainings and participants' evaluation of the effectiveness of the trainings will be collected using registration records, participant surveys, and interviews by the grant program coordinator. The impact of the on-line teacher training module will be gathered using registration records, pre/post measures, and results of the school safety survey.

As a result of this project, the effectiveness and efficiency of TATs will be enhanced. There will be an increased awareness of behavioral TA activities and expectations by school staff by targeted TA training in school divisions. Sustainability of on-going training needs will increase with train the trainer sessions within the school divisions, and accurate data collection will be improved with the use of a case management tool.

Sustainability Plan

The VCSCS is committed to the sustainability of this project beyond the grant period, and a plan to continue the initiatives outlined in this Program Narrative is provided in a separate attachment.