

# WILKES-BARRE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICE DEPARTMENT

730 S. Main Street, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18711-0375

## THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAM

In June of 2019, Pennsylvania passes a law that requires schools in the commonwealth to establish threat assessment teams. The Wilkes-Barre Area School District has established such teams, both at the building and administrative levels. Members include building principals, guidance counselors, school nurses and school police officers; as well as District level administrators and other personnel when warranted.

The goal of these teams is to keep everyone safe and work with the student making the threat before they act. Threats can be made by someone who wants to:

- Harm themselves
- Harm other students
- Harm school staff members
- Harm the school building
- Bring harm to the community

#### THREAT ASSESSMENT

- A fact-based, investigative approach to determining how likely a person is to carry out a threat of violence;
- A means to identify, assess, and manage individuals who are at risk for violence against themselves or others; and
- A way to identify someone who has the potential for violence in many forms-self harm, assault, risk-taking behaviors, suicide, substance abuse, and other aggressive or dangerous behaviors.

Threat Assessment is focused on a given individual or individuals as potential threat, and conducted as the need arises. Information regarding threats may be provided from a variety of sources, including the Safe 2 Say system.

## **Threat Assessment Process**

- 4. Manage
- 3. Assess
- 2. Inquire
- 1. Identify
- 1. **Identify** the person or situation whose behavior has raised some concern about potential violence.
- 2. **Inquire/Ask Questions** and gather additional relevant information about the person and situation.
- 3. Assess the person and situation based on the totality of information that is reasonably available to determine whether the person or situation poses a threat of violence or harm to others and/or self.
- 4. Manage the threat by implementing an intervention, supervision, and/or monitoring plan to prevent harm where possible and to reduce/mitigate impact of the situation.

### Step 1. Evaluate the threat.

Obtain a detailed account of the threat, usually by interviewing the person who made the threat, the intended victim, and other witnesses. Write the exact content of the threat and key observations by each party. Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made and the student's intentions. Is there communication of intent to harm someone or behavior suggesting intent to harm?

No.

Not a threat. Might be an expression of anger that merits attention.



Yes.

### Step 2. Attempt to resolve the threat as transient.

Is the threat an expression of humor, rhetoric, anger, or frustration that can be easily resolved so that there is no intent to harm? Does the student retract the threat or offer an explanation and/or apology that indicates no future intent to harm anyone?



Serious,

Case resolved as transient; add services as needed.

Case resolved as a serious substantive

needed.

threat; add services as



## Step 3. Respond to a substantive threat.

For all substantive threats:

- Take precaution to protect potential victims.
- Warn the intended victim and parents/guardians.
- Look for ways to resolve the conflict.
- Discipline the student, when appropriate.

Consider if the threat is Serious or Very Serious.

Serious means a threat to hit, fight, or beat up, whereas Very Serious means a threat to kill, rape, or cause very serious injury with a weapon.



Very Serious.

# Step 4. Conduct a safety evaluation for a very serious substantive threat.

In addition to the steps above,

- Screen the student for mental health services and counseling. Refer as needed.
- Law enforcement investigation for evidence of planning and preparation, or criminal activity.
- Develop a safety plan that reduces risk and addresses student needs.
  The plan should include review of IEP, if already receiving special education services, and further assessment, if possible disability.



#### Step 5. Implement and monitor the safety plan.

Document the plan. Maintain contact with the student. Monitor whether the plan is working and revise as needed.

Adapted from Dewey G. Cornell, <u>Overview of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG)</u>, University of Virginia, June 18, 2018.