ST. VRAIN VALLEY SCHOOLS

academic excellence by design

Threat Assessment

Guide

August 2013

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History & Research

St. Vrain Valley Schools reviewed multiple threat assessment protocols before selecting the Adams County Threat Assessment Protocol as a model for conducting threat assessments in St. Vrain. This protocol is research-based and provides a sound structure for review of potentially threatening behavior. We want to thank the Adams County Youth Initiative for permission to use the Threat Assessment Protocol.

Adams County Threat Assessment Protocol documents provided by and used with permission from the Adams County Youth Initiative

www.acyi.org

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THREAT ASSESSMENT RESEARCH BASIS

The Safe School Initiative

In 2002, the U.S. Secret Service in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education completed the *Safe School Initiative* (SSI), a study of school shootings and other school-based attacks. This study examined nationwide data from 1974 through 2000, analyzing a total of 37 incidents involving 41 student attackers. The information gleaned from this study resulted in the following 10 conclusions about school attacks:

1. Incidents of targeted violence at school rarely were sudden, impulsive acts.
2. Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack.
3. Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing the attack.
4. There is no accurate or useful "profile" of students who engaged in targeted school violence.
5. Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.
6 Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide.
7. Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.
8. Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
9. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
10. Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.

The SSI made the key recommendation that schools develop multidisciplinary threat assessment teams who can aid in the prevention and intervention of students who may pose potential threats for targeted violence.

Threat Assessment Principles

The SSI further identified six principles that form the foundation of an effective threat assessment process.

1. Targeted violence is the end result of an understandable process of thinking and behavior.
2. Targeted violence stems from an interaction between the individual, the situation, the setting, and the target.
3. Effective threat assessment requires an investigative, skeptical, inquisitive mindset during the Threat Assessment Process.
4. Effective threat assessment is based on facts, rather than characteristics or traits.
5. Effective threat assessment requires an integrated systems approach.
6. Investigate whether or not a student poses a threat, not whether a student has *made* a threat.

Threat Assessment Inquiry: A Summary of the Secret Service Eleven Questions

Based on the SSI findings, the Secret Service identified eleven key questions that can help determine if a threat is viable. Both the *Threat Assessment Screen* and the *Full Team Threat Assessment* utilize these eleven questions:

1. What are the student's motives and goals?

2. Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?

3. Has the subject shown inappropriate interest in school attacks or attackers, weapons, and/or incidents of mass violence?

4. Has the student engaged in attack related behaviors?

5. Does the student have the capacity to carry out the threat?

6. Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation or despair?

7. Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?

8. Does the student see violence as an acceptable or desirable way to solve problems?

9. Are other people concerned about the student's potential for violence?

10. Is the student's conversation and "story" consistent with their actions?

11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of violence?