



MH
COGGINS

& ASSOCIATES

PROACTIVE STRATEGIES + PREVENTIVE MEASURES

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REFRAMING **SCHOOL SAFETY** AS AN ENTERPRISE-WIDE ENDEAVOR

- Vulnerability assessments
- Physical security
- Access controls
- Active shooter training
- Emergency preparedness plans
- School culture, AND
- **BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT (BTA)**



WHAT IS BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT?

- 
- **A systematic process & methodology to:**
 1. Identify threats and risk
 2. Assess the seriousness and potential for violence
 3. Manage, mitigate, & prevent violence and other adverse outcomes
 - **Evidence based approach, developed from extensive research & practice**
 - **Comprehensive framework to investigate concerning behaviors & communications**



2021

Averting Targeted School Violence

A U.S. SECRET SERVICE ANALYSIS OF
PLOTS AGAINST SCHOOLS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE

NATIONAL THREAT ASSESSMENT CENTER


Why is BTA so Important?

- ☐ Goal is proactive and preventive, not reactive
- ☐ The process is standardized and comprehensive, not idiosyncratic
- ☐ Focus is on concerning behaviors & communications, not threat-centric
- ☐ Objective is to provide early-stage interventions & support, before behavior escalates
- ☐ Emphasizes relationships with caring & trusted adults as protective factors, eliminating shame, stigma, and silence

WHY IS **BTA** MANDATED IN MANY STATES?

- BTA is recognized as the standard of best practice for preventing targeted violence in schools
- Investigates key themes from multiple studies of school attackers
- BTA provides a clear evidence-based strategy for implementing a targeted violence prevention plan



The background of the slide is a photograph of several people sitting at a long wooden table, possibly in a meeting or workshop. They are looking down at papers or writing. A semi-transparent blue overlay covers the entire image. The main title is centered in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

HOW DO WE KNOW IF OUR CURRENT THREAT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES ARE SUFFICIENT?

CONDUCT A PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

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HOW TO GET **STARTED!**

Use of
BTA Teams

Team Training
& Experience

Methods for
Reporting

Triggers for a
TA Process

Processes for
Investigating
Concerns

Methods for
Classifying
Seriousness

Case
Management
Protocols

Forms &
Documentation

School Culture &
Security
Awareness

OBJECTIVES

Supt. Hood recognized the need for a program evaluation to be conducted to assess the strengths & weaknesses of OPS threat assessment (TA) processes.

OPS administrators expressed a desire to improve upon existing practices and to standardize TA processes across the district.

Purpose: Ensure standards of best practice to prevent violence, identify threats, assess seriousness, and mitigate risk.

WHAT WE DID

Formed a Risk Prevention Working Group

- Cross section of Administrators/Principals, school social workers & psychologists, & counselors across the HS, MS, & ES levels

Completed a structured group interview process to examine the key pillars of a behavioral threat assessment program (December 2022)

Issued Key Findings (January 2023)

Prepared Action Plan (January 2023)

Working Group meets bi-monthly to execute Action Items (February 2023)

KEY FINDINGS

OPS does a good job of handling incidents and reports of threats as they arise on a case-by-case basis

Processes are not standardized or formalized

TA teams are formed ad hoc, but no structured teams

Staff who conduct TAs have not received specialized behavioral threat assessment training

There are many ways to report concerning behaviors, communications, & threats to OPS officials.

OPS culture encourages reporting & the role of all staff as “trusted adults”

KEY FINDINGS, continued

OPS threat assessment investigations are not guided by an evidence-based TA framework

Decision-making about the level of risk is complicated, without a “decision-tool” to guide the process

Documentation protocols for TA cases are unclear

Case management and threat mitigation efforts provide for ongoing monitoring and intervention for high-risk situations

Overall community security awareness is high and “hypervigilant”

School culture is proactive & focused on prevention

OPS & Meridian TWP PD place a value on strengthening liaison efforts around TA objectives



MAJOR ACTION ITEMS

- ☐ Formalize the OPS Risk Prevention Core Working Group
- ☐ Identify TA team members, number of teams, & determine team structure
- ☐ Design a Multi-Tiered Case Classification System
- ☐ Determine case documentation & record-keeping procedures, including forms to track the assessment & investigative findings
- ☐ Develop & deliver specialized TA team training to staff
- ☐ Write policies and operational procedures



MAJOR ACTION ITEMS, continued

- ☐ Expand reporting mechanisms and promote information awareness around what to report & how to report
- ☐ Community messaging & awareness that promotes behavioral threat assessment and risk prevention in a safe & caring school culture
- ☐ Provide ongoing SME for consultation for complex, sensitive cases, recurrent training, team mentoring and program oversight
- ☐ Enhance liaison relationships with law enforcement, mental health, & other support resources

TENTATIVE TIMELINE

Spring Semester 2023: Form teams & teams structure, develop case classification system, design forms, address reporting methods

2023

Summer Break 2023: Conduct specialized teams & staff training

2023

Fall Semester 2023: Roll out new TA processes & pilot

2023

Spring Semester 2024: Tweak & refine

2024

Policies, messaging, awareness campaigns, SME support, partner liaison

Ongoing

BENEFITS OF A **BTA PROGRAM**

1

Uses validated procedures to identify, assess, and manage risk

2

Ensures a consistent, systematic approach across all incidents & cases

3

Relies on a multi-disciplinary, collaborative decision-making process to categorize the seriousness of threats

4

Provides accountability & documentation for the process

5

Reduces vulnerability & liability for schools by following standards of best practice

6

Ensures the integrity of the threat assessment decision-making process

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