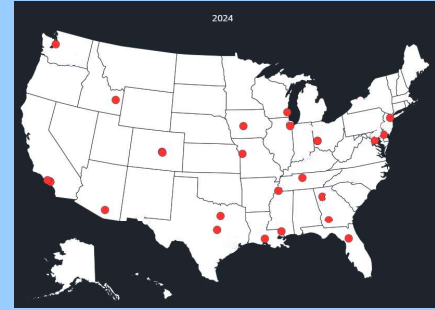


Caution

This presentation has disturbing violent content, including a school shooting and discussion of threat assessment to prevent violence. You have permission to excuse yourself from any portion of this class.

All school shooting homicides must be prevented, but they are not as pervasive as it seems.

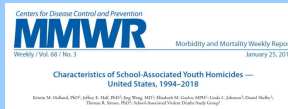


In 2024, 22 schools had a shooting homicide, but in a country with 130,000 schools, the average school can expect a homicide every 5,909 years. ($130,000 \div 22$)

Why we need school threat assessment and how it works

1. How prevalent are school shootings?
2. Case example
3. What is school threat assessment?
4. How do we know it works?

Schools Respond to Surge of Threats After Georgia School Shooting



CDC Study of Youth Homicides at School

What percentage of youth homicides occur at school?

- A) 50%
- B) 10%
- ✓ C) 2%

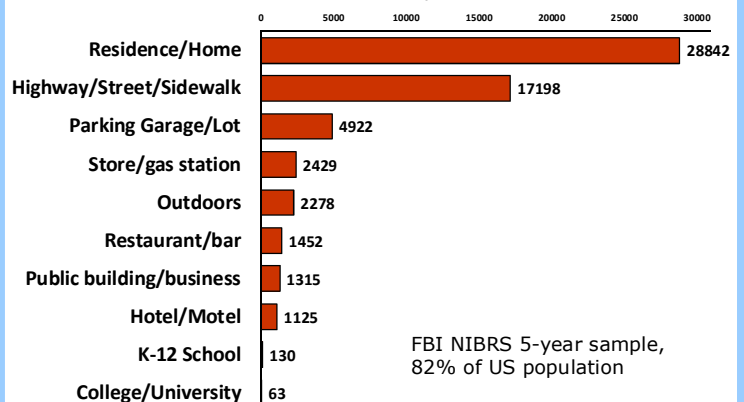
A youth is 50x more likely to be killed outside of school than at school.

Youth means school-age, 5-18



MARJORIE HENNINGSON HIGH SCHOOL (2018)

Selected Locations of 59,754 Homicides



Source: FBI National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) database for 5 years ending 2024.
<https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/crime-trend>

Annual Gun Toll

36,000 deaths
63,000 injuries
100,000 total



274



Shootings per day

Shooting deaths from: CDC National Vital Statistics
http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/dataRestriction_inj.html
Shooting injuries from: <http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/nfirates2001.html>



A school flood would not panic community leaders into believing that schools are dangerous places. We do not sandbag our schools or stock them with life preservers.



The U.S. is flooded with gun violence.

Why we need school threat assessment and how it works

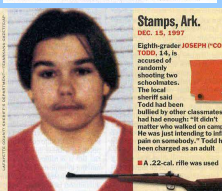
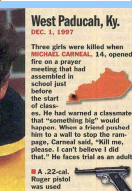
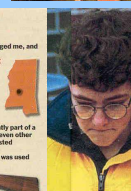
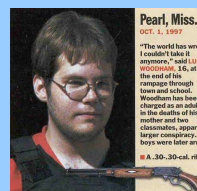
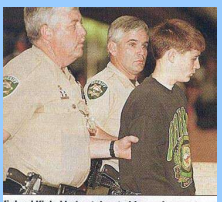
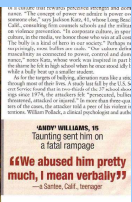
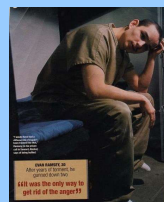
1. How prevalent are school shootings?
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4. How do we know it works?

Schools Respond to Surge of Threats After Georgia School Shooting



Floods spread everywhere.

Bullying motivated many of the school shootings





Middle School Bullying

- Gossip column in school newspaper says he and his best friend John have "feelings for one another"
- Called "gay boy"
- Shoved, spit upon
- Pants pulled down



Leonardo DiCaprio
school shooting in
The Basketball Diaries

Movie Inspiration

- Joins an outcast group known as "the freaks"
- The boys are inspired by a movie in which a boy takes revenge on bullies
- The boys plot revenge and discuss "shooting up the school"



High School Bullying

- Teasing continues in high school, food taken at lunch, lab work ruined in class
- Band teacher permits further harassment as traditional "initiation"
- Gym teacher makes him play basketball with the girls



West Paducah, Ky. DEC. 1, 1997

Three girls were killed when **MICHAEL CARNEAL**, 14, opened fire on a prayer meeting that had assembled in school just before the start of class-
es. He had warned a classmate that "something big" would happen. When a friend pushed him to a wall to stop the rampage, Carneal said, "Kill me, please. I can't believe I did that." He faces trial as an adult

■ A .22-cal. Ruger pistol was used



LA FAYETTE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT—JEFFERSON GAZETTE-STAR



Deterioration under Stress of Bullying

- He becomes depressed and suicidal, cuts himself
- Joins an outcast group known as "the freaks"
- These boys plot revenge and discuss "shooting up the school"
- Becomes paranoid, hears voices taunting him and urging him to take revenge

Three students killed, 5 wounded in shooting



McCracken police: Boy, 14, opened fire on prayer circle

By JAMES MALONE
The Courier-Journal

HEATH, Ky. — A freshman strolled into the lobby of Heath High School yesterday morning, calmly pulled a pistol from his backpack and opened fire as a student prayer circle was disbanding, police and witnesses said.

In less than two minutes, eight students had been shot — three fatally.

The 14-year-old shooting suspect, who took the time to put in ear plugs before opening fire, had warned classmates last week that "something big is going to happen," said the high school's principal, Bill Bond. But the students didn't take the boy seriously and did not report the remarks to school officials. No motive has been determined.

After the shooting, authorities found the youth had brought four more guns with him and more than 600 rounds of ammunition.

Attendees moved one of the students hurt in yesterday's shooting at Heath High School to an ambulance. A 14-year-old freshman was arrested and charged in the deaths of three students. Five others were wounded at the school west of Paducah.

Michael Carneal was arrested after the shootings at



Carneal pleads guilty in shootings



PHOTOS BY JAMES H. WALLACE, THE COURIER-JOURNAL.
An officer led Michael Carneal, left, to a police car waiting outside the McCracken County Courthouse after Carneal pleaded guilty but mentally ill in the murder of three students in a shooting at Heath High School.

Why we need school threat assessment and how it works

1. How prevalent are school shootings?
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Schools Respond to Surge of Threats After Georgia School Shooting



Prevention Opportunities

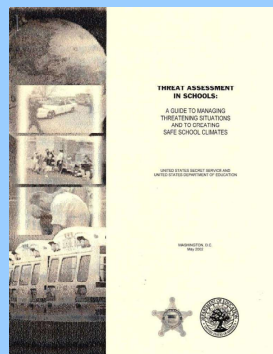
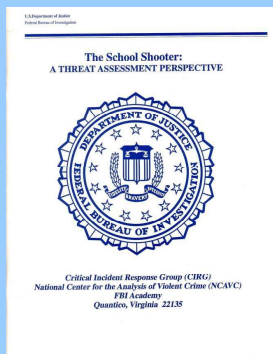
**Bullying
Mental Illness
Peer Influences
Access to guns**

**No one reported
his threats**

What is behavioral threat assessment and management?

BTAM is a problem-solving approach to violence prevention that involves assessment and intervention with students who have threatened violence in words or behavior.

The FBI, Secret Service, and Dept of Education recommended a threat assessment approach more than 20 years ago.



Threat assessment is a problem-solving approach to violence prevention

We can reduce the risk of violence by identifying the problem, need, or conflict underlying a threat and helping the individual to find a non-violent resolution.



Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM)

- 1. Identification:** friends, family members, or others seek help when concerned about someone in distress/threatening violence.
- 2. Evaluation:** Threat assessment team gathers information to evaluate the seriousness of the threat.
- 3. Intervention:** The team initiates assistance to address the underlying problem, conflict or need. In the most serious cases, protective action is taken.

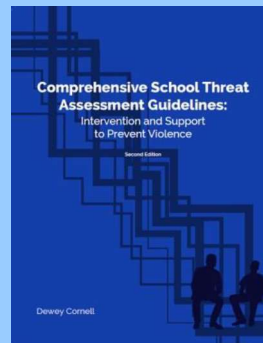
Threat assessment is an alternative to zero tolerance

- Zero tolerance uses punitive discipline for all students regardless of the circumstances or the seriousness of their behavior.
- Threat assessment considers the context and content of the behavior. The student's intentions matter.

Threat Assessment

Threat Assessment in Schools

Virginia Model of School Threat Assessment



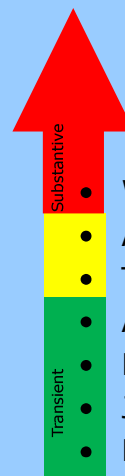
2024 2nd edition

- Developed 2001 at University of Virginia
- School-based teams gather information
- Follow decision-tree to determine whether threat is transient or substantive
- Take protective action if substantive
- Attempt to resolve the problem underlying the threat

School-Based Threat Assessment

1. Compared to adults, students
 - frequently make threats;
 - often engage in fights;
2. Over-reactions to student misbehavior have serious negative consequences.
3. Schools have a duty to educate all students.

Continuum of Threats



- Warning of impending violence
- Attempts to intimidate or frighten
- Thrill of causing a disruption
- Attention-seeking, boasting
- Fleeting expressions of anger
- Jokes
- Figures of speech

Two groups of students who make threats



Threat Assessment Steers Between 2 Errors



Overreaction

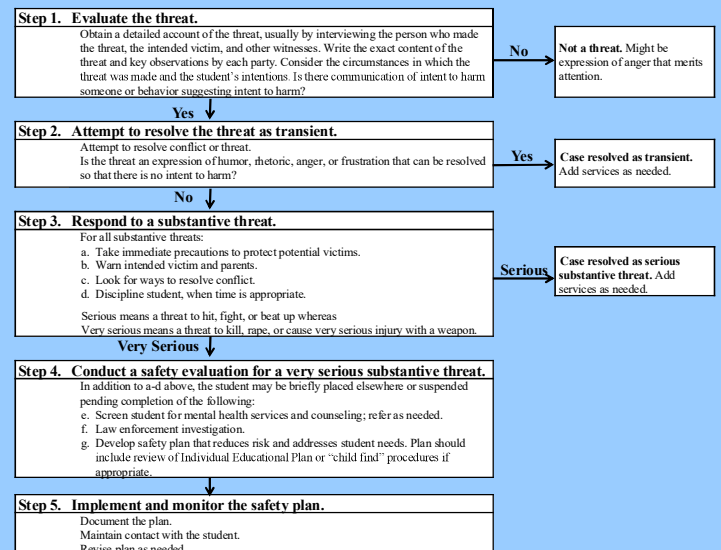
Excessive punishment for a threat that is not serious

Underreaction

Failing to prevent a serious threat.



Many reasons why students make threats



Over-Reaction

School Suspends Second Grader for Eating His Pop-Tart Into the Shape of a Gun



4 Categories

Criteria

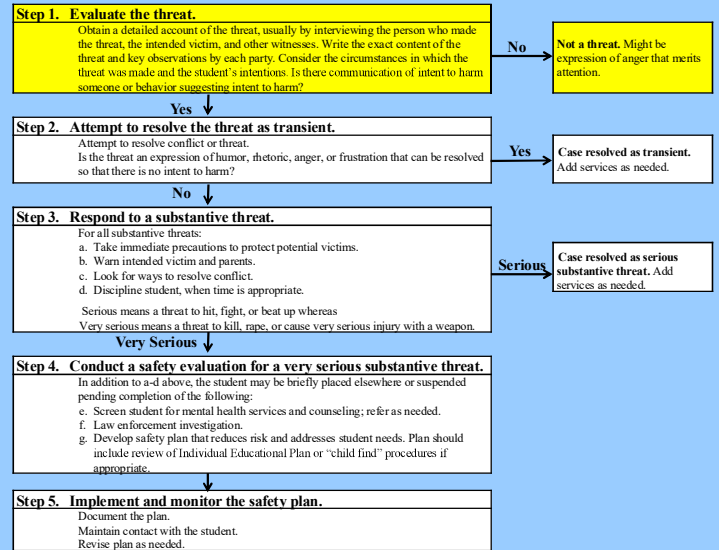
No threat	False rumor
Transient threat	Expression of anger or frustration easily resolved, no intent to attack
Serious Substantive Threat	Intent to fight
Very Serious Substantive Threat	Intent to shoot, stab, kill, or severely injure

Jay

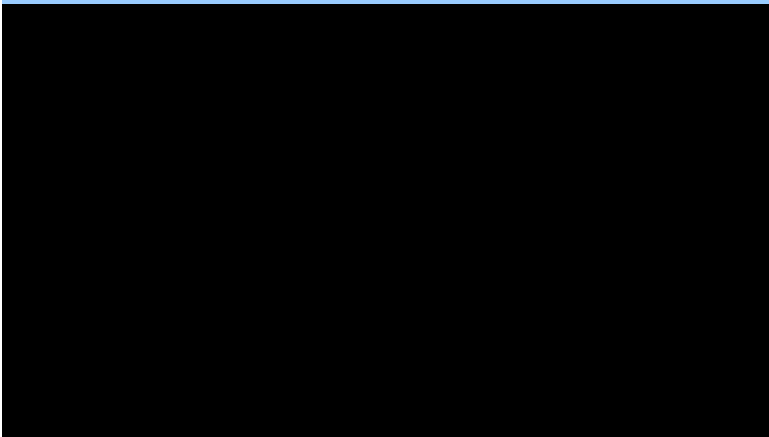


Two students reported to a teacher that a student in the cafeteria named Jay said that he is going to become a serial killer. The students are worried that he plans an attack on the school.

You interview Jay in your office.



Version 1



Jay - 2



Now let's try a different version of this situation.

Jay - 1

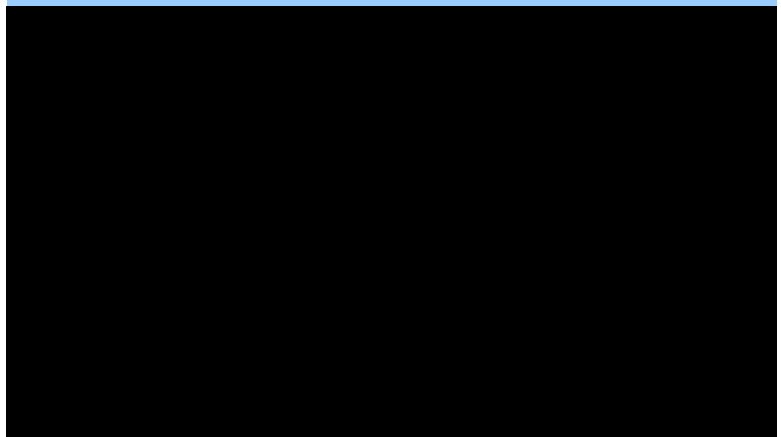


Jay was just talking about the costume he was going to wear for Halloween. He didn't threaten anyone, and his comments were misunderstood by two students who only heard a fragment of the conversation.

How would you classify this threat?

- a) Not a threat
- b) Transient threat
- c) Serious substantive threat
- d) Very serious substantive threat

Version 2



Jay - 2



Now Jay says that he was frustrated that a friend was teasing him, and he thought it would shut him up if he said he was going to become a serial killer. He got the idea because they just saw a movie involving a serial killer. He did not realize it would upset everyone. He has no interest in killing anyone and he is sorry he said that. The witnesses corroborate Jay's account. If there is no other information to contradict this explanation, how would you classify this threat?

- a) Not a threat
- b) Transient threat
- c) Serious substantive threat
- d) Very serious substantive threat

Version 3



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 expression of anger that merits attention.

Yes

Step 2. Attempt to resolve the threat as transient.

Attempt to resolve conflict or threat. Is the threat an expression of humor, rhetoric, anger, or frustration that can be resolved so that there is no intent to harm?

Yes

Case resolved as transient. Add services as needed.

No

Step 3. Respond to a substantive threat.

For all substantive threats:

- a. Take immediate precautions to protect potential victims.
- b. Warn intended victim and parents.
- c. Look for ways to resolve conflict.
- d. Discipline student, when time is appropriate.

Serious

Case resolved as serious substantive threat. Add services as needed.

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 a-d above, the student may be briefly placed elsewhere or suspended pending completion of the following:
e. Screen student for mental health services and counseling; refer as needed.
f. Law enforcement investigation.
g. Develop safety plan that reduces risk and addresses student needs. Plan should include review of Individual Educational Plan or "child find" procedures if appropriate.

Step 5. Implement and monitor the safety plan.

Document the plan.
Maintain contact with the student.
Revise plan as needed.

Jay - 3



Now Jay says that he is not getting along with another boy named Leon. Leon has been picking on him and he thought it would shut him up if he said he was going to become a serial killer. He says it didn't work, and he has no intent to kill anyone, but he realizes he is probably going to have to fight Leon to settle the matter. He says they will probably have a fight after school so that he will not be suspended for fighting. If there is no other information to contradict this explanation, how would you classify this threat?

- a) Not a threat
- b) Transient threat
- c) Serious substantive threat
- d) Very serious substantive threat

Jay - 3



Now let's change the situation again.

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?

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

Yes

Step 2. Attempt to resolve the threat as transient.

Attempt to resolve conflict or threat.

Is the threat an expression of humor, rhetoric, anger, or frustration that can be resolved so that there is no intent to harm?

Yes

Case resolved as transient. Add services as needed.

No

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Step 5. Implement and monitor the safety plan.

Document the plan.
Maintain contact with the student.
Revise plan as needed.

Jay - 4



One final variation.

In very serious substantive cases, the team conducts a safety evaluation leading to a safety plan.

1. Safety interviews with:

- Student
- Intended victim/witnesses
- Student's parent
- School staff who know student (including SRO, school counselor, teachers)
- Outside professionals who know student

2. Law Enforcement investigation

Jay - 4

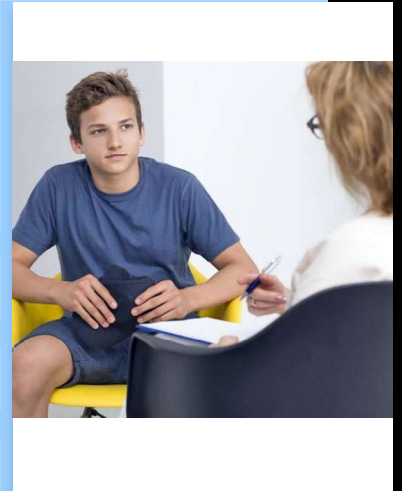


One final variation. Jay denies saying anything about a serial killer. However, other students tell us that Jay is upset over being bullied by some older boys. One student said that Jay asked where he could obtain a handgun. Jay posted some photos of serial killers on Instagram. How would you classify this threat?

- Not a threat
- Transient threat
- Serious substantive threat
- Very serious substantive threat

Safety Interview

- Not a prediction model.
- Identify any mental health needs.
- Identify reasons why threat was made.
- Propose strategies for reducing risk.



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 expression of anger that merits attention.

Yes

Step 2. Attempt to resolve the threat as transient.

Attempt to resolve conflict or threat. Is the threat an expression of humor, rhetoric, anger, or frustration that can be resolved so that there is no intent to harm?

Yes

Case resolved as transient. Add services as needed.

No

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Step 5. Implement and monitor the safety plan.

Document the plan.
Maintain contact with the student.
Revise plan as needed.

Law Enforcement Investigation of Very Serious Substantive Threats

- Interview suspects and witnesses.
- Conduct searches for weapons and other evidence of planning.
- Serve as a resource for students with fears or information to share.
- Take appropriate protective action.



If you have about 30-40 minutes, you could use the case involving Mason, a boy on the autism spectrum who threatened to kill a classmate. This is the final case in Level 1 and it shows interviews and team meetings, and an intervention at the end. You can drop slides about confidentiality/FERPA not relevant to Brazil. This case could be present before or after the research section. It might make a nice closing after the research.

(You will flinch at the acting, but I can explain why we did not do additional takes to make it better.)

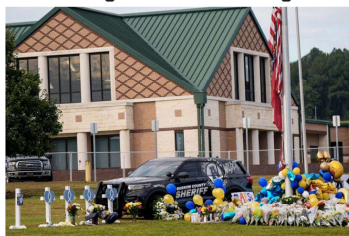
How do we know that CSTAG works?

- It sounds good?
- Experts endorse it?
- You had a positive experience using it?

Why we need school threat assessment and how it works

1. How prevalent are school shootings?
2. Case example
3. What is school threat assessment?
4. How do we know it works?

Schools Respond to Surge of Threats After Georgia School Shooting



How do we know that CSTAG works?

An evidence-based practice is one that has been tested with scientific studies demonstrating that it works.

How do we know that CSTAG works?

- It sounds good?
- Experts endorse it?
- You had a positive experience using it?





Research on Threat Assessment

1. Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Kaplan, S., McConville, D., Douglas, J., Elkon, A., McKnight, L., Branson, C., & Cole, J. (2004). Guidelines for student threat assessment: Field-test findings. *School Psychology Review, 33*, 527-546.
2. Kaplan, S., & Cornell, D. (2001). Threats of violence by students in special education. *Behavioral Disorders, 31*, 107-119.
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4. Allen, K., Cornell, D., Lorek, E., & Sheras, P. (2009). Response of school personnel to student threat assessment training. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 19*, 319-332.
5. Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2009). A retrospective study of school safety conditions in high schools using the Virginia Threat Assessment Guidelines versus alternative approaches. *School Psychology Quarterly, 24*, 119-129. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0016182>
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7. Cornell, D., Allen, K., & Fan, X. (2012). A randomized controlled study of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines in grades K-12. *School Psychology Review, 41*, 100-115.
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9. Nickswold, F., Cornell, D. (2015). Student threat assessment associated with positive school climate in middle schools. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management, 2*, 98-113. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2158122215580048>
10. Burnette, A. G., Datta, P., & Cornell, D. G. (2018). The distinction between transient and substantive student threats. *J. of Threat Assessment and Management, 5*, 4-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158122218780004>
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12. Cornell, D., & Maeng, J. (2018). Statewide implementation of threat assessment in Virginia K-12 schools. *Contemporary School Psych, 22*, 116-124. doi: [10.1007/s40688-017-0146-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-017-0146-x)
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14. Burnette, A. G., Konold, T., & Cornell, D. (2019). Grade-level distinctions in student threats of violence. *Journal of School Violence, 19*, 323-335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439862.2019.1638872>
15. Stehman, S., & Cornell, D. (2019). An online educational program to increase student understanding of threat assessment. *Journal of School Health, 89*(11), 899-906. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12822>
16. Maeng, J., Cornell, D., & Huang, F. (2020). Student threat assessment as an alternative to exclusionary discipline. *Journal of School Violence, 19*, 377-388. doi: [10.1080/10439862.2019.1702632](https://doi.org/10.1080/10439862.2019.1702632)
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18. Cornell, D., & Maeng, J. (2020). *Student Threat Assessment as a Safe and Supportive Prevention Strategy: Final Technical Report.* Charlottesville, VA: School of Education and Human Development, University of Virginia.
19. Stehman, S., Konold, T., & Cornell, D. (2020). *Evaluation of threat assessment training for school personnel.* *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management.*
20. Maeng, J., Cornell, D., Kerec, J., Huang, F., Konold, T., & Afolabi, K. (2023). *School Threat Assessment in Florida: Technical Report of 2021-2022 Case Data.* Charlottesville, VA: School of Education and Human Development, University of Virginia.

Student Outcomes

1. Most students receive support services such as counseling.
2. Most students remain in their school.
3. Suspension rates decline.
4. Racial disparities in suspension diminished or not present.
5. Few students are subject to arrest, court charges, or incarceration.



CSTAG Research

1. **Field-tests** - Virginia and Memphis
2. **Training evaluations** - Virginia, Florida, National
3. **Controlled studies** - 6 in Virginia
4. **Large-scale implementation** - Virginia and Florida
5. **Fidelity, consistency, long-term outcomes** - Current 3-year study of about 500 schools in 6 states

What can you expect? Results from a Florida Statewide Implementation

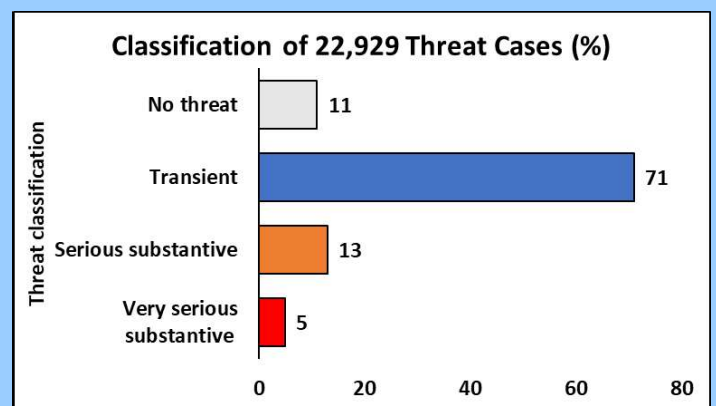


- Statewide training and implementation following Parkland shooting
- Data from 60 of 67 Florida districts
- 3,400 schools
- 23,000 threat cases (2021-2022 AY)

See technical report from University of Virginia Youth Violence Project for more information. <https://education.virginia.edu/yvp>

Safety Outcomes

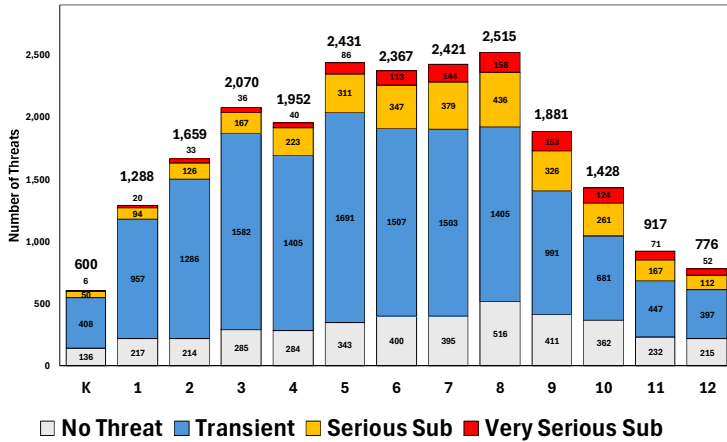
1. Thousands of threats resolved without violence. Few threats attempted. Mostly fights.
2. 99% no serious injuries.
3. No shootings or fatalities.
4. Less bullying and peer aggression.
5. Students and teachers report more positive school climate.



Florida statewide sample of 3,400 schools (Maeng et al., 2023)

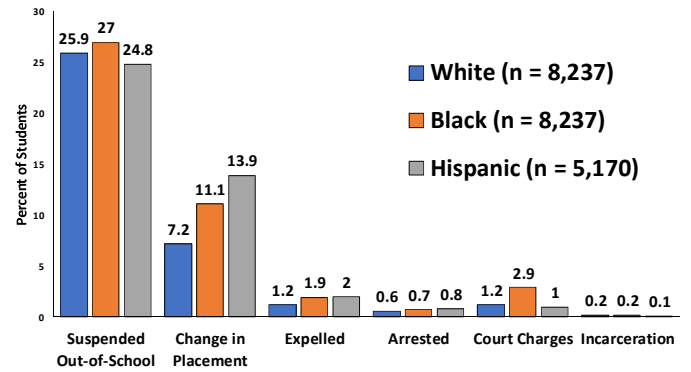
Threat Classification for Florida Grades K-12

N = 22,307



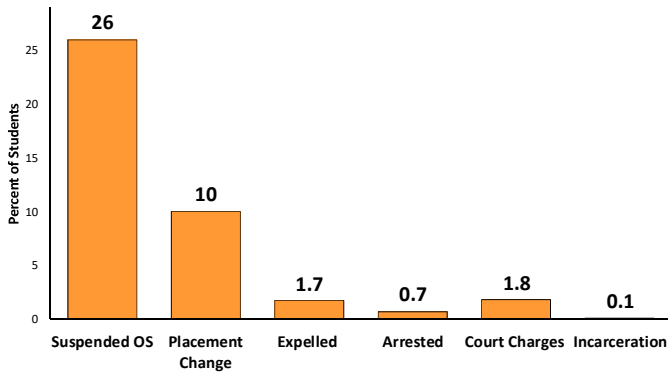
Disciplinary and Legal Outcomes by Race/ Ethnicity

(n = 21,644)



Florida technical report for 2021-2022 school year.

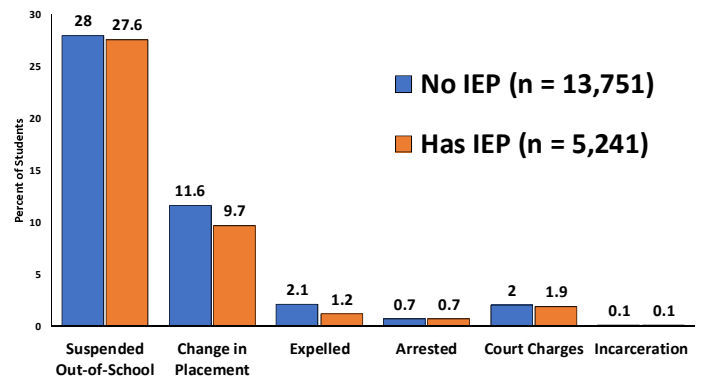
Florida Disciplinary and Legal Outcomes (n = 23,134)



Florida 2021-2022 school year.

Disciplinary and Legal Outcomes by IEP Status

(n = 18,992)



Florida 2021-2022 school year.

Fairness and Equity Concerns

- Threat assessment must be a fair and equitable process for all students.
- We want to avoid unfairly excessive punishment or criminalization for minor misbehavior.
- We want equitable treatment of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and regardless of disability status.

Research Team



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