

Linking People and Resources

REGION 5 T/TAC

Regional Wrap-Up

Lessons Learned from the Safe School Initiative

Targeted school violence— a situation in which a school has purposefully been selected as the site of a violent, preplanned attack—is rare. Nonetheless, an event of this nature affects every community in some way. It interrupts teaching and learning. It erodes confidence in public education. It creates fear in the hearts of students, staff, and community. For these reasons, it is important to be prepared— to develop a threat assessment process that involves the school community, as well as law enforcement, mental health providers, and other local stakeholders.

Since June 1999, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Secret Service have been working as a team to try and understand— and ultimately help prevent— school shootings in America. The Safe School Initiative has been a collaborative effort drawing from the Secret Service’s experience in studying and preventing assassinations and other types of targeted violence, and the Department of Education’s expertise in helping schools facilitate learning through the creation of safe environments for students, faculty, and staff.

The Safe School Initiative has included an extensive examination of 37 incidents of targeted school shootings and school attacks that have occurred in schools in the United States, beginning with the earliest identified incident in 1974 through June of 2000. The purpose of the study has been to examine the thinking, planning, and other behaviors of students who have carried out school attacks. Throughout the collaboration, the two agencies have focused on one common goal: to develop accurate and useful information about prior school attacks that could help prevent some future incidents.

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Special points of interest:

- *Creating a Climate of Safety*
- *Identifying Students of Concern*
- *ADHD Conference*
- *Assistive Technology*
- *Conditional Licenses*

Safe School Initiative

In the summer of 2002, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Secret Service presented the findings of the Safe School Initiative at 12 daylong trainings in six cities nationwide (see Key Findings, right). They also distributed copies of their recent publication, *Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates*, to some 3,000 educators, law enforcement officials, and mental health providers gathered at the trainings. Distributing the Guide to local communities is essential, because one of its main purposes is to help “real people” with “real jobs” - that is, the Guide is intended to provide school and law enforcement officials practical guidance in preventing targeted school violence and in identifying, assessing, and managing students who may pose a risk for targeted violence in schools.

According to the Guide, effective threat assessment can only occur in the larger context of school safety—threat assessment must be linked to existing school safety plans, not seen as just “one more thing to do.” Following are some key points of the guide.

Establishing an Integrated Approach

Threat assessment is a complex process that requires a team commitment, prior planning, and lots of practice. One person, or even one office, cannot do it alone. That is why an effective threat assessment is based on an integrated systems approach, key stakeholders come

together to establish protocols and procedures, and to identify existing and needed resources for both the students of concern* and the whole school community. These key players

Key Findings of the Safe School Initiative

- Incidents of targeted violence at school were rarely sudden, impulsive attacks.
- Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker’s plan.
- Most attackers did not directly threaten their targets prior to advancing the attack.
- There is no accurate or useful profile of students who engage in targeted school violence.
- Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.
- Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failure. Many had considered or attempted suicide.
- Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.
- Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
- In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
- Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shootings were stopped by other means than the law enforcement intervention.

discuss, plan, and agree on what should take place if and when a situation arises. This kind of planning is at the core of a successful threat assessment process—ensuring that decisions

and plans are in place and that specific individuals have been delegated the authority to conduct assessments and share information if the need arises.

Creating a Climate of Safety

The Guide encourages creating a climate of safety and respect in the school environment (see Strategies, right). This is a climate that facilitates learning and breaking down “codes of silence” that hinder opportunities to help students in need. The Guide emphasizes that a trusting school environment—one in which each young person is connected to and has a relationship with a responsible, significant adult—can facilitate the identification of students of concern* and help prevent a tragedy.

*Identifying Students of Concern

The Guide provides valuable information on identifying students of concern. These are students who, based on a threat assessment inquiry and/or investigation, pose a possible threat of violence. The Guide differentiates between students who actually pose a threat of targeted school violence and those who make a threat. Using the findings of the Safe School Initiative, information that is collected, and 11 key questions from the Guide (see questions, right), threat assessment teams will be better equipped to identify and assess students who area threat to the safety of the school community, as well as to provide necessary services to those students.

Strategies for School Leaders

Creating cultures and climates of safety is essential to the prevention of violence in schools. A safe and connected school climate includes:

- An assessment of the school's emotional climate
- An emphasis on the importance of listening
- A strong but caring stance against the "code of silence"
- Active work on changing the perception that talking to an adult about a student contemplating violence is "snitching"
- Prevention of, and intervention in, bullying
- Involvement of students in planning, creating, and sustaining a school culture of safety and respect
- Efforts to ensure that every student can develop a trusting relationship with at least one adult at school
- Mechanisms for developing and sustaining safe school climates
- Physical environments that reflect zones of safety
- Use of an integrated systems model

What Can the Guide Do For You ?

Threat assessment as a strategy continues to evolve, and the *Threat Assessment Guide* is a roadmap for beginning the process of integrating threat assessment into existing safe school plans. It suggests that each school community assess what it is already doing in the area of school safety. It then suggests that each school community:

- Establish a threat assessment team (if one is not in place);
- Make sure that the team is composed of individuals who have the ability and the authority to make decisions and respond to a targeted school violence situation; and
- Proceed with identifying what is missing, what is needed, and what requires strengthening in the school's threat assessment plan.

Effective threat assessment brings key players together to make decisions that can decrease levels of fear and opportunities for tragedy that targeted school violence imposes on a school's students, staff, and community.

The Guide is available online at www.ed.gov. It is also available through ED Pubs by calling 1-877-4ED-PUBS.

Questions to Ask When Determining Whether To Take Action Against a Student of Concern

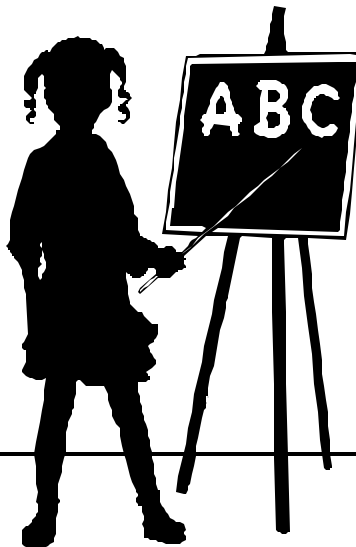
1. What are the student's motives or goals?
2. Has the student expressed any indication of an intent to attack?
3. Has the student shown inappropriate interest in school attacks or attackers, weapons, or incidents of mass violence?
4. Has the student engaged in attack-related behaviors?
5. Does the student have the capacity to carry out an act of targeted violence?
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 accepted, desirable, or the only way to solve problems?
9. Are the student's words consistent with his or her actions?
10. Are others concerned about the student's potential for violence?
11. What circumstances might affect the likelihood of an attack?

US Department of Education News

The US Department of Education has released two new books for parents. *Helping Your Child Through Early Adolescence* focuses on how parents and families can influence the growth and development of their children from the years 10 through 14. The booklet offers tips on how to respond to physical, emotional, and cognitive changes, how to help resist harmful peer pressure, how to identify problems such as alcohol or drug use, eating disorders, and depression. The other book,

Helping Your Child Succeed in School, provides activities for ages 5 through 11 that parents can share with children to help them master reading, understand the value of homework, develop other skills necessary to achieve, succeed on test taking. English

and Spanish versions are available while supplies last through the Department's publication center at 1.877.4ED.PUBS or from www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/hyc.html



No Child Left Behind

A 180-page desktop reference manual for the education reform law, *No Child Left Behind*, is available from the US Department of Education. The guide provides information about the major reforms under the new law, how the four guiding

principles of the law (accountability, flexibility and local control, parent options, and research-based practices) impact educational programs, key re-

quirements, and other vital information about NCLB.

An online version is available at www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/reference.html

Special Education Teachers with Conditional Licenses

Special education teachers with conditional licenses: Are you teaching LD, ED, or MR in Virginia? The Commonwealth Special Education Endorsement Program has spring and summer **grant money available** for courses taken through Old Dominion University's distance

education program. For all required endorsement classes, the grant will pay all tuition costs except for \$100 per course. All courses are offered at a community college site near you. Go to the web page at: www.odu.edu/cseep to read about the program and to download the grant appli-

cations. Interested teachers also may call 800.968.2638, extension 5372 for information.

Virginia's Transition Forum 2003: Shared Responsibility for the Educated Employee

The Virginia Transition Forum is cited as one of the best experiences for those who work with youth who have disabilities at the middle and high school level. This year is expected to be better than ever with topics such as access to the general curriculum, adult life service options, basic transition, services for challenging youth, assessment, empowering family and students, higher education/post secondary programs, model programs, career and technical education/career development,

instructional strategies, disability specific practices, and employment outlook.

Visit the web site at <www.radford.edu/~conf-serv> to glance through the schedule or contact Sally Chappel at T/TAC for more information.

March 17 – 19, Roanoke



Transition Practitioner's Council Meeting

The mission of the TPC is to: "Provide a forum to exchange ideas, offer support, and network problem solving strategies that enhance the implementation of quality transition services throughout Virginia." This forum will provide information

about resources available to you within Virginia. The agenda for April will include the Fair Labor Standards and Accommodations in the Workplace (ADA).

For more information, contact Sally Chappel at T/TAC.

April 3, Location TBA

Congratulations



Congratulations to Dr. Reid Linn and Dr. Esther Minskoff, professors of special education at James Madison University. Dr. Linn, co-director of the JMU T/TAC, was named the 2003-2004 Distinguished Teacher, and Dr. Minskoff was named the 2003-2004 Madison Scholar, for the JMU College of Education.

Coming Soon...

March 11 & 12 Assistive Technology

This TWO day conference offers a variety of sessions including: assistive technology and IEPs, AT and transition issues, visual strategies use, software applications, and updates on other current assistive technology topics.

DAY ONE, March 11th, is designed for ELEMENTARY personnel.

DAY TWO, March 12th is designed for SECONDARY personnel.

March 4 Raising the Bar

Improving the Standard of Care for Individuals with ADHD is an annual event hosted by the Alvin V. Baird Attention and Learning Disabilities Center at James Madison University, the Region 5 Training and Technical Assistance Center, and McNeil Pharmaceuticals. Each year researchers, physicians, educators, clinicians, and students come together with the common goal of sharing information and knowledge to further the understanding of the various aspects of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. This year's meeting will be held at James Madison University's College Center in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

March 21 Feeding Children with Disabilities

This workshop provides an overview of oral-motor development, as well as a comprehensive, collaborative, family focused approach to feeding children with disabilities. Participants will develop a feeding plan for a student with whom they are currently working. A feeding lab will be offered to provide a more realistic view of feeding processes. This is an awareness level training.

Audience: special education teachers and paraprofessionals, therapists, parents

March 25 Autism Series II, Part II: Structured Teaching

This is the second of a three part series that assists the professional and/or paraprofessional in techniques to use when teaching students with autism spectrum disorder or Asperger syndrome. It is designed for those who have an understanding of this field and a good knowledge of the disability.

This session will focus on utilizing the methods of the TEACCH program and developing strategies to teach children with these difficulties. Strategies will include room arrangement, use of individualized daily schedules, work/activity systems, and visual instructions/visual organization for children of low, moderate, and high ability.

April 29 Autism Series II, Part III: Visual Strategies

This is the third of a three part series that assists the professional and/or paraprofessional in techniques to use when teaching students with autism spectrum disorder or Asperger syndrome. It is designed for those who have an understanding of this field and a good knowledge of the disability.

Discover effective "structured teaching" strategies. Learn to set up a visual environment, develop daily schedules, and provide structured tasks to increase student success and independence. Become skilled in teaching the students to use the visual strategies that have been specially designed to meet their needs. Create materials so that students can look at tasks and visually answer: What do I have to do? How much do I have to do? When will I be finished? and What do I do next?

For More Info...

Phone: 540.568.6746 or 1.888.205.4824
Fax: 540.568.6726
Email: henslejk@jmu.edu

We're on the Web!
<<http://web.jmu.edu/ttac>>