

Understanding the Threat Assessment process in SWASD

August 15, 2023

Composition of Threat Assessment Teams

- As a minimum, each Team is to include individuals with expertise in:
 - School health
 - Counseling, school psychology or social work
 - Special education
 - School administration
 - + School Safety Coordinator
- This composition of TAT members should not be understood as the final composition... A core team of 3-5 members, augmented by others...

The principles of Threat Assessment | Pathway to Violence

- Targeted violence is the end result of an *understandable*, and frequently *discernible*, process of *thinking and behavior* known as the Pathway to Violence



Reportable behaviors: Examples

- Physical violence toward a person or property
- Direct or indirect threats of violence
- Bullying that continues after interventions to stop the behavior
- Possession of weapons on school grounds or school events
- Any statements or behaviors indicating suicidal thoughts or behaviors
- Any behaviors or communications that suggest the individual has engaged in:
 - Research or planning related to carrying out a targeted attack
 - Efforts to acquire the means to engage in an attack
 - End of life planning

Reportable behaviors: Other concerning behaviors

- Any act, gesture or statement that would be interpreted by a reasonable person as threatening or intimidating, such as:
 - Overt physical or verbal intimidation
 - Throwing objects or other gestures intended to cause fear
 - Making contextually inappropriate statements about harming others
- Unusual or bizarre behavior that would cause a reasonable person to fear injury or harm due to its nature and severity, such as:
 - Stalking
 - Erratic or bizarre behavior suggestive of mental disturbance or substance abuse
 - Fixation with mass murder, weapons, or violence generally
 - Fixation with hate group, terrorist, or extremist material

Sources of information

Background Information

- Recent and historical school or work performance history
- Prior TAT contact(s)
- Contact with law enforcement or security at school and in the community
- Student records

Other Sources of Information

- Information from the threat recipient, witnesses, target, student, caregivers, teachers and others who regularly interact with the individual
- Social media presence
- Internet usage / search history
- Criminal records
- Search of person, property, locker and/or desk
- Information from previous schools
- Information from community-based medical or mental health providers

Access health records and behavioral history

- Upon a preliminary determination a student's behavior may indicate a threat to the safety of the student, other students, school employees, school facilities, the community or others ... to facilitate the timely assessment of, and intervention, a Team *shall* (Art. XIII-E § 1302-E (d)) have access to the following student information *to the extent permissible under State and Federal law*:
 - Student health records
 - Prior school disciplinary records
 - Records or information relating to court adjudication (through juvenile probation)
 - Records of any prior behavioral or mental health or psychological evaluations or screenings *maintained by the school entity*
 - Other records or information that may be relevant to evaluating a threat or determining treatment or referral options for a student that are maintained by the school entity, e.g., SAP referrals

Obligations under Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act [FERPA]

- **LEU:** Police officers or security staff employed or authorized by the school to monitor safety and security in and around school premises, or specifically designated school officials responsible for referring potential or alleged violations of law to local police authorities
- Investigative reports / other records created and maintained by LEU ***are not considered subject to FERPA***
- These ***can be disclosed***, including to outside LE, ***without the consent of caregivers***

Education Record Disclosure exceptions under FERPA:

- In an emergency, school officials are permitted to disclose education records without consent to protect the health or safety of students or other individuals

FERPA's Relationship with Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA]

DOE & DHHS guidance on relationship between FERPA and the HIPAA Privacy Rule:

Disclosures to Prevent a Serious and Imminent Threat: Health care providers may share PHI with anyone as necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to the health or safety of the individual, another person, or the public ... This permission includes the sharing of psychotherapy notes, which otherwise receive special protection under the [HIPAA] Privacy Rule.

Thus, without a patient's authorization or agreement, health care providers may disclose a patient's health information to anyone who is in a position to prevent or lessen the threatened harm, including family, friends, caregivers, and law enforcement.



[DOE & DHHS Guidance on Application of FERPA and HIPAA to Student Health Records](#)



Response to a reported threat

- Use a standardized protocol for gathering information and for interviewing:
 - Who will interview students who might pose a risk for violence?
 - Who will talk to classmates, teachers, or caregivers?
 - How will information gained through interviews be documented?

Response to a reported threat: Initial interviews to verify a reported threat

- Where threat is not imminent, circumstance will help determine who and when to interview
- Student who might pose a threat of violence may be among the last to be interviewed
- Goal of initial interviews: Evaluate the potential threat in context and consider:
 - Student's explanation of the threat's meaning
 - Perceptions of the threat's meaning by the target / witnesses
- Record an interviewee's exact words
- Initial interviews should begin with open ended questions
- Ask witnesses and potential targets about their perceptions, feelings and interpretation of the student's communication or behavior
- Ask the student about their statements / behavior

Response to a reported threat: Initial interviews to verify a reported threat

- Initial information gathering should include developing an understanding of the motivation of the *individual who initially reported the threat*
- This includes an understanding of the *relationship between the reporter and the individual of concern*
- The possibility that reports may be made for malicious / spurious reasons must be considered as a possibility and ruled out as part of TA
- In questioning the student, you are trying to gain an understanding of the context in which their behavior occurred, their intentions and motivations, their understanding of the impact of their behavior on others and their future plans

Intake and Initial Inquiry

- Extent of information gathering undertaken impacted by the level of concern presented by the individual and / or the situation
- The initial information gathered is reviewed by a subset of the full Team. Goal: To determine ***whether the threat can be quickly and easily resolved and whether existing resources and mechanisms are sufficient to address those concerns***
- The Intake and Initial Inquiry step also answers the critical question: ***Is there an imminent or direct threat posed by the subject / situation?***
- If yes, immediate protective actions need to be taken and, dependent on the nature of the concern, notification to Law Enforcement
- Crisis response procedures (school entity's EOP) would be initiated and the TA 'paused'
- Once safety of student, target and environment are established, TAT can reconvene

Intake and Initial Inquiry > Triage

- Now the scope of the TA broadens to include more people and more information to develop a holistic view of the student who might pose a threat of violence / situation
- Triage will more fully develop lines of inquiry using STEP© as a framework, whether undertaken once actions to mitigate an imminent threat have been taken, or carried out where the Intake and Initial Inquiry step determined there was no imminent threat
- To perform triage, readily accessible information is gathered: interviews, records checks
- At the conclusion of Triage step:
 - If it cannot be determined with a reasonable degree of confidence that the subject of concern is *no threat or presents only a low level of concern*, a full *Inquiry* is undertaken by the full TAT and the subject / situation of concern are determined to pose a **Substantive Threat**
 - If Triage determines no threat / low level of concern (*Transient Threat*), case is either documented and closed or referrals / other supports to address remaining concerns occur

Intake and Initial Inquiry > Triage

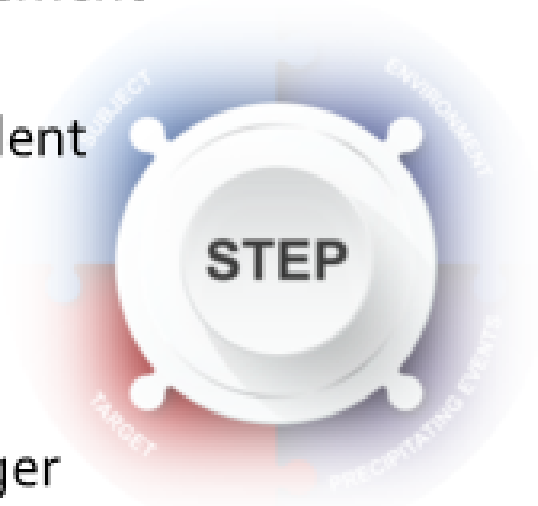
- A third determination is also possible
- That the individual *poses no threat to others* but *does pose a threat to self*
- These cases will be rare
- If the TAT observe warning signs or risk factors for suicide risk, but no indicators of a threat to others:
 - Student should be immediately referred to the Act 71 team / Crisis Response Team
 - The TA case would be closed
 - If the Act 71 team / Crisis Response Team subsequently identify potential for threat to others, the student would be referred back into the TA process

Assessing the situation and classifying threats

- We use the information gathered to determine whether the threat is classified as:
 - Low Risk Threat - Low Level of Concern – **Transient Threat** unless other STEP[®] concerns
 - Moderate Risk Threat - Moderate Level of Concern – **Substantive Threat** at Moderate Risk / Level of Concern and beyond
 - High Risk Threat - High Level of Concern
 - Imminent Threat
 - Direct Threat
- Classification as **No Concern** is also possible and so is that the individual poses no threat to others but does pose a threat to self

Goals of threat management

- Control the situation/individual to prevent the possibility of violence
- Protect and aid possible targets to the extent possible
- Provide support and guidance to help individuals deal successfully with their problems
- STEP© can provide a useful framework for approaching threat management coherently:
 - **S:** De-escalate, contain, or control the individual who may take violent action
 - **T:** Decrease vulnerabilities of the target
 - **E:** Address environment and systems to discourage escalation
 - **P:** Prepare and mitigate against precipitating events that may trigger adverse reactions



Subject [Student posing a threat of violence]

- Threat Management responses generally fall into: (1). Discipline; (2). Behavioral interventions and supports; (3). Mental health support and skill-building
- Examples of strategies:
 - Increasing engagement to build rapport, decrease isolation, problem solve about grievances, monitor reactions to interventions and precipitating events
 - Referral to SAP for assistance with academic, behavioral or social-emotional challenges
 - Referral for in-school / community-based mental health assessment and/or special education or 504 Plan evaluation via MDT/CST
- For students not identified with a disability, consider whether the information gathered suggests a referral to consider special education eligibility is appropriate



Coordinating with others

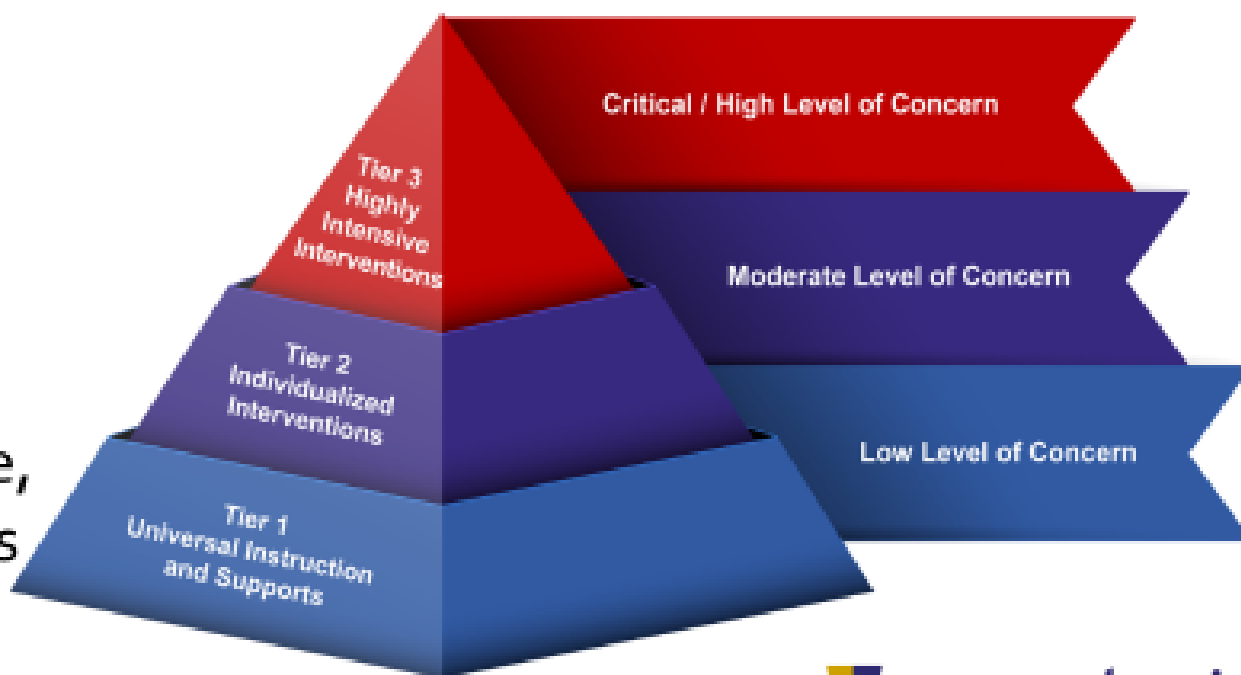
- TA is designed to work in conjunction with, and not in place of, existing programs and frameworks, including:
 - Student Assistance Program (SAP)
 - Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)
 - Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS)
 - School climate initiatives
 - Trauma-informed approaches
 - Social-emotional learning
 - Suicide prevention and awareness
- It is ***vitaly important that these Teams can work together*** and not in isolation or in conflict



[PCCD Guidance for coordination and communication with other school-based teams for TATs](#)

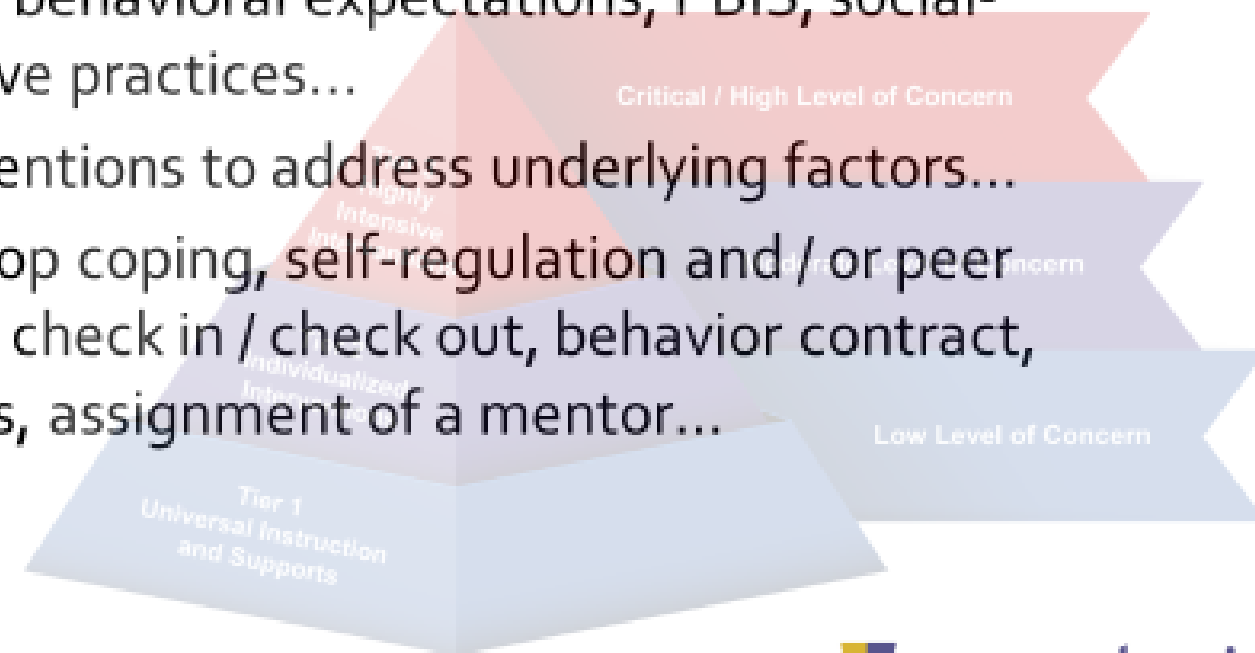
Tiered interventions

- STEP enables us to track the complex, multi-factor nature of BTAM cases from Inquiry to Management
- TATs can additionally use MTSS to help determine the specific mix / intensity of interventions
- MTSS provides a framework for responding to situations of concern – whether those involving TA or complementary / parallel processes associated with academic performance, behavior and social-emotional wellness
- Must be applied holistically

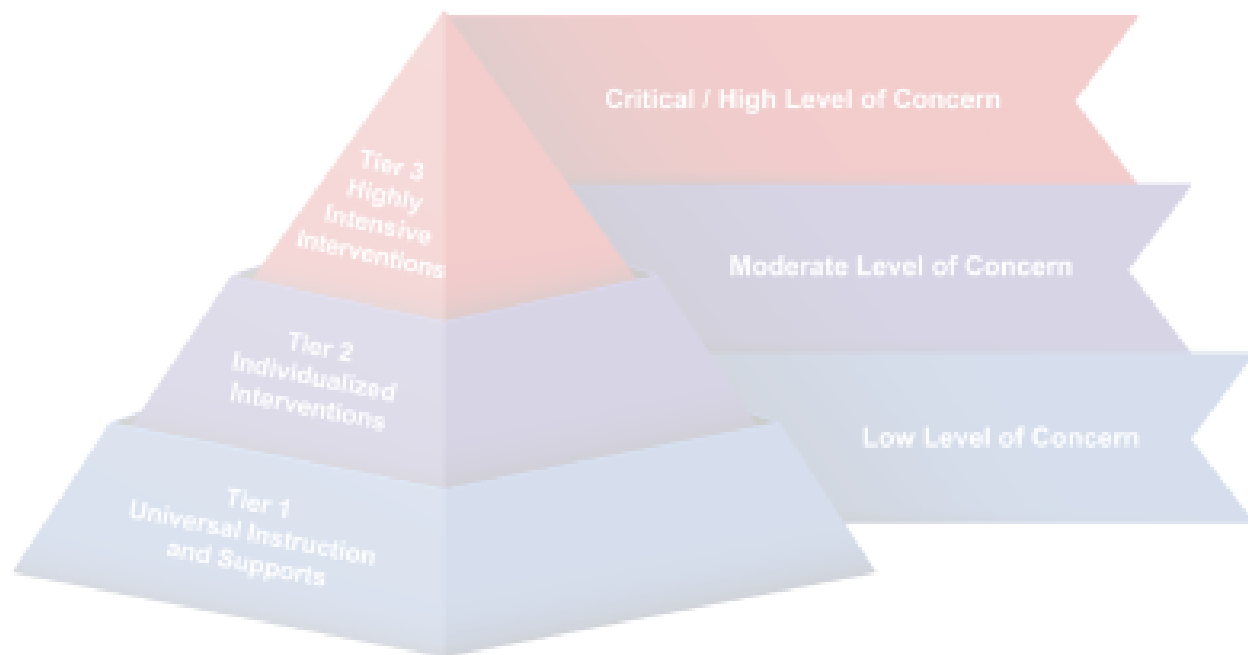


Tiered interventions

- **Tier 1:** Foundation for the MTSS framework and encompasses the entire school / practices that contribute to a positive school climate...
 - ... proactive classroom management strategies, positive relationships between staff and students, clear and objective behavioral expectations, PBIS, social-emotional learning curricula, restorative practices...
- **Tier 2:** Individualized, targeted interventions to address underlying factors...
 - ... in-school group counseling to develop coping, self-regulation and/or peer relationship skills, academic supports, check in / check out, behavior contract, referral to community based resources, assignment of a mentor...



Tiered interventions



- **Tier 3:** Highly intensive, individualized interventions and supports...
- ... multi-agency involvement, potentially criminal charges / high discipline consequences, potential change in educational placement, SPED eligibility or placement, referral for mental health assessment, increased supervision and monitoring, FBA, BIP...

Re-entry plans

- Supports listed in the re-entry plan as actions to be taken by the school, caregiver, or student
- Ensure actions are assigned ***to a named individual***
- Case Manager responsible for communicating the plan within the TAT and other school staff, for monitoring it and reconvening TAT if necessary
- Team, caregivers, student sign the plan and copy given to caregivers and student
- Plan should be attached and stored with the threat management case record
- ***If determined the student poses a continued threat of violence, TAT will develop, implement, and monitor an individualized Safety Plan***

Safety plans

- **Purpose:** To establish and maintain consistent measures to follow in cases *when a student displays unsafe behavior AND is considered at risk for future unsafe behavior*
- Must be individualized
- Addresses a specific behavior that is dangerous to the student / others
- Safety Plans will generally cover:
 - Description of the specific unsafe behaviors and warning signs or triggers
 - Crisis Response Plan
 - Strategies known to be effective in de-escalating the situation
 - Supports to be put in place to lessen the likelihood of the unsafe behavior
 - Plan for monitoring and terminating the plan

Please trust the district!





**SOUTH
WILLIAMSPORT
EDUCATION FOUNDATION**

CREATING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

WHO WE ARE

The South Williamsport Education Foundation is a volunteer 501 (c) (3) organization committed to enhancing the overall student experience by developing partnerships, organizing resources, and securing funds for students and educators of the South Williamsport Area School District.

WHAT WE DO

1. Distribute grants for innovative educational projects to teachers and students in the SWASD. Since our formation we've allocated over \$225,000 in fields such as the Arts, STEM, Reading/Writing, and Career and Technical.
2. Select 6 graduating seniors to receive annual scholarships totaling over \$37,000

SUPPORT OUR MISSION

Make a donation by visiting our website:

<https://foundation.mounties.k12.pa.us>

Volunteer at an upcoming event!



THE THEREMIN PROJECT