

## STUDENT THREAT ASSESSMENT

### Overview for parents

We use a standard procedure for responding to student threats of violence called "threat assessment." Threat assessment was recommended by the FBI and by the U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education in their studies of school violence. Threat assessment guidelines were developed and field-tested at the University of Virginia, and they have been adopted for use by hundreds of schools.

The basic idea is that when a student communicates a threat to harm someone, the threat assessment team will do an assessment to determine how serious the threat is and what can be done to prevent the threat from being carried out. In most cases of school shootings, the student communicates a threat before taking action, and, if these threats can be identified, violence can be prevented. However, it is important not to treat all threats the same way, because most threatening statements made by students are not serious threats. The job of the threat assessment team is to determine how serious the threat is and how to respond to it. The team will investigate threats, quickly resolve the "transient" threats, and take further action to deal with the "substantive" threats. Research has shown that the vast majority of threats can be resolved safely and without drastic consequences such as school expulsion.

It is important to remember that it is highly unlikely that a student will carry out a threat to commit a homicide (national statistics show that the odds are no greater than 1 in 3 million that a student will be victim of a homicide at school and that the average school can expect a student-perpetrated homicide only once every 12,800 years). In most cases, threats are a sign that a student is frustrated, angry, and in need of help resolving a problem. A goal of threat assessment is to address this underlying problem.

*If your child knows about a student who has made a threat, it is important to contact the school principal.*

**What is a threat?** A threat is any expression of an intent to harm someone. Threats may be spoken, written, or expressed in some other way, such as through gestures. Threats may be direct ("I am going to beat you up") or indirect ("Watch me beat him up after school"). A threat can be vague ("I'm going to hurt him") or implied ("You better watch out"). Possession of a weapon will be investigated as a possible threat.

**What should parents do?** Students are often reluctant to tell us about threats, because they don't want to be considered "snitches." Teach your son or daughter that there is a difference between snitching and seeking help to prevent an act of violence.

**What if my child is involved in a threat?** If your child makes a threat or is the target of a threat, we will contact you, advise you of our response, and seek your support and assistance in resolving the threat.