

Threat Assessment a New Focus for Pennsylvania Schools

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Each Pennsylvania school district has until the start of the 2021-2022 school year to assemble "threat assessment teams" at its schools, and the state has offered guidance on how to make that happen.

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency School Safety and Security Committee recently released the K-12 [Model Threat Assessment Procedures and Guidelines](#). It provides suggested procedures and guidance for school entities and their school threat assessment teams, now required under Act 18 of 2019.

In order for members of threat assessment teams to carry out their duties, Article XIII-E of the PA Public School Code explicitly permits access to student information maintained by the school entity such as:

- Student health records
- Prior school disciplinary records
- Records or information related to adjudication
- Records of any prior behavioral, mental health or psychological evaluations or screening
- Other records or information that may be relevant to evaluating a threat or determining treatment/referral options

The privacy of student information is still governed by federal laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Threat assessment teams should only handle, create and access student records and information for the purpose of completing the threat assessment process.

Additionally, the guidelines provide procedural steps for the assessment and intervention with students whose behavior poses a threat to themselves, other students, school staff, the community or others. These include:

- Creating and promoting a safe, positive school climate
- Establishing a threat assessment team
- Defining prohibited and concerning behaviors
- Creating or identifying a central reporting mechanism
- Determining the threshold for law enforcement intervention
- Establishing assessment procedures
- Developing options for response and interventions
- Conducting training and providing information to all stakeholders
- Promoting equity, continuous improvement, and sustainability

The state will provide free comprehensive online threat assessment team training and technical assistance opportunities for school entities during the 2020-21 school year.

If you have any questions on the new guidance or any other topic, please contact any member of the [Barley Snyder Education Practice Group](#).