Prevention of School Violence:
Student Threat Assessment and Related Approaches

A Review of the Current Literature

by

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for

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

- School violence is an issue of serious concern to those directly connected to educational institutions as well as the broader community. Student Threat Assessment (STA) is one approach to preventing violence perpetrated by students internal to the school.
- This report summarizes findings of a review of the research on STA and related school violence prevention approaches that was conducted to inform and guide decision-making by Calgary and Area RCSD schools and partners.
- The review used rapid review methods to locate, procure and review over 200 documents from six scientific disciplines and the internet for the years 2010 through 2017.
- Knowledge about school violence prevention and response has advanced substantially in the past 20 years; as have closely related literatures on bullying prevention and broader community youth violence prevention.
- **Key Messages:**
- Many evidence-based school violent prevention programs/practices are available and there is substantial consensus on a 3-tiered approach, however, achieving the best mix of specific programs at each level is challenging.
- Early approaches to preventing student violence stressed physical safety but, more recently, the importance of balancing physical safety with psychological safety is recognized.
- School-based interventions predominate in youth violence prevention; more contemporary documents also emphasize the importance of understanding youth violence as a broader community issue.
- A handful of specific STA approaches were found. Only one of these: the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG), is sufficiently researched to be officially endorsed as an evidence-based practice. Assessment tools to support STA were also reviewed; the Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) was found to have the most research support.
- Key issues in implementation of STA include adaptation to the local context, the importance of enabling legislation for information sharing, the importance of ongoing training, as well as the importance of clearly defining the critical role of law enforcement members of the team.
- The importance of interagency collaboration is also stressed by leading researchers in STA: "*Recent research highlights the need for improved interagency collaboration in the delivery of mental health and support services to students. A tension exists between integrated and independent efforts, where core mission and goals, resource-driven decision making, systems incompatibilities, turf battles, and lack of infrastructure to support interagency collaboration set the stage for problematic outcomes" (Cornell & Mayer, 2010).*
- Recent STA innovations include developmental approaches, newer school climate/discipline approaches as well measuring STA outcomes that are aligned with schools' primary goals.
- Very little literature was found on issues of culture, diversity and disability in relation to STA, but given the disproportionate application of some earlier violence prevention practices, leading experts in the field recommend embedding cultural safety/disability awareness approaches in STA protocols and training.
- There was almost nothing found in the STA-related literature on structures to plan and govern school violence prevention broadly and STA specifically; but there is no reason to believe that principles and practices arising from the literature on collaborative networks and related topics would not apply.
- A set of violence prevention and STA resources to support next steps was also compiled.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

School violence is an issue of serious concern to those directly connected to educational institutions as well as the broader community. Alarm about school violence is fueled by the deeply disturbing, albeit rare, incidents of mass homicides in schools such as Columbine, Taber, Newtown, and the recent tragedy in La Loche, Saskatchewan. But concern about increases in more common types of aggressive behavior in schools, including bullying/victimization are also frequently expressed.

While statistics reveal that our schools are actually very safe places and the risk of extreme violence involving fatalities is comfortingly lower than outside-of-school settings, it makes good sense to take reasonable action toward violence-free schools and communities. The challenge is to determine the best set of actions among the dozens of types of school-based approaches (and hundreds of specific programs), to ensure that those actions are effective in producing the outcomes of interest in balance with other school priorities, and to implement them efficiently and with fidelity.

Interventions to prevent (and respond to) violence in schools include physical security measures, school discipline policies, other administrative policies, police partnerships, peer reporting, and student threat assessment (STA), often in concert with more multi-pronged/multi-level interventions on school climate, youth violence prevention and/or bullying prevention.

Threat Assessment (TA) (also called Violence Threat Risk Assessment) is one approach to preventing violence perpetrated by students internal to the school. TA approaches originated in law enforcement strategies related to threats against public officials, and they have also been adapted for workplace violence. The first adaptation of TA for preventing school violence was developed in the U.S. in early 2000s and called Student Threat Assessment (STA). It was based on recommendations of authorities after careful review of school shooting incidents. In the 15 years since that time, research and practice has advanced considerably as well as related school violence prevention approaches. STA focuses on assessing threats from students at risk of perpetrating violence or students already engaged in aggressive behaviors.

This report summarizes findings of a review of the research and grey literature about STA (including current practice and effectiveness) in context of related school violence prevention approaches. The purpose of the review was to inform decisions related to STA development and implementation in Calgary and Area RCSD schools, and more specifically in regard to the potential of developing a region-wide STA protocol inclusive of multiple partners and community agencies. The report includes references with recommended reading, definitions, and a list of additional resources by topic. The complete Bibliography is available separately.

2. Background

Violence in schools is an issue of serious concern to administrators, educators, mental health professionals, law enforcement personnel, students, parents, policy-makers, researchers and the broader community. Concerns about school violence, understandably, are drastically elevated in response to school rampage events (also called targeted school violence and student homicidal violence)[1] involving multiple fatalities of children, youth and staff. However, these incidents are actually

very rare. Because of their sheer horror and extensive media coverage, the incidents have created an impression of increasing youth violence over a period of two decades when the frequency has been declining[1,2].

In the U.S., it has been shown that children are at much greater risk of violence outside of school[3,4] and that most youth violence occurs in the streets. In a very recent paper, Cornell et al. (2015) reported that the average American school can expect a student homicide once every 6000 years[5]. Rappaport et al. (2015) expressed the risk another way, based on statistics from the Centres for Disease Control (CDC): that there is one homicide or suicide per 2.7 million enrolled students in the U.S.[6]. However, these authors also noted that there continue to be concerning rates of bullying, victimization, fighting, weapon possession and threats.

In Canada, reliable data on serious violence in schools are lacking, although Ontario and Nova Scotia have now made reporting of weapons possession and assault mandatory (in 2011 and 2012 respectively)[7]. In a major review of school violence by a Toronto Panel in 2008 (The Road to Health 2008) multiple incidents of weapons in schools were noted[8]. Teachers in Ontario have also recently raised public alarm about increases in violence and aggression in elementary classrooms; calling on the government to provide more supports for students, including more school counselors and mental healthcare[9]. Data on bullying are more plentiful in Canada[10], showing that victimization occurs at a concerning frequency, and regularity, and provides support for the view that broad scope prevention is an important priority.

With respect to incidents of serious violence, the frequently expressed view that events are so unpredictable that they cannot be prevented is unfounded. Cornell (2010) argues that prevention can be effective even in the absence of perfect prediction of individual student behavior[4]. Research and development into prevention of both serious and less serious, but more frequent, violence has been fruitful, and bears out this claim. It makes good sense to take reasonable action to prevent both more serious and more frequent types of aggressive behavior with the ultimate goal of violence-free schools and communities.

A range of school violence prevention and response approaches, with varying levels of research support, are available. They include physical security measures, school discipline policies, other administrative policies, police partnerships, peer reporting, and STA, often in concert with more multi-pronged/multi-level interventions aimed at improving school climate, and youth violence prevention and/or bullying prevention programs. Threat Assessment (TA) (also called Violence Threat Risk Assessment) is one approach to preventing violence perpetrated by students internal to the school. TA approaches originated in law enforcement strategies related to threats against public officials, and they have also been adapted for workplace violence. The first adaptation of TA for preventing school violence was developed in the U.S. in the early 2000s by Dewey Cornell and colleagues at the University of Virginia[11] and called Student Threat Assessment, after recommendations from U.S. educational and security authorities, and based on findings of focused studies of targeted school violence incidents. In the 15 years since that time, research and practice has advanced considerably on STA as well as related school violence prevention approaches.

The primary aim of this review was to summarize the current evidence for the effectiveness of STA as well as research advances in STA-related practice (such as assessment tools). Section 3 outlines the review methods in brief. A description of the literature included in the review is provided in Section 4, and the findings are presented in Section 5. In order to properly contextualize the evidence for STA, a

summary of the current evidence for the effectiveness of related school violence prevention approaches is provided, followed by a more comprehensive review of the literature on STA in the latter half of that Section. In the final section, Section 6, a compilation of overarching recommendations from the literature is presented.

3. Review Methods in Brief

We used the 'rapid review' approach (e.g., Lal 2014[12]), which is an adaptation of systematic literature review methods, primarily involving condensation of the review steps to fit the more abbreviated time-line typical of policy and practice-based research questions. Our process included definition of the search parameters for the peer-reviewed and grey literature in consultation with a professional librarian, consensus approaches to selection of materials, a second round of searches to ensure comprehensiveness and systematic approaches to notation and write-up.

The searches yielded 824 eligible abstracts from the scientific literature from 2010 through 2017 across the fields of education, sociology, social work, psychology, health, and justice, as well as 311 eligible documents or websites from the 'grey literature'. 157 peer-reviewed articles (including textbooks) and 47 grey literature documents were selected through systematic consensus processes. 143 documents were directly cited in the review report and the total Bibliography is comprised of 969 items. More details on the methods of the review can be found in Appendix 2.

4. Description of the Literature Found

<u>Time Frame, Author Location and Usability</u>

In terms of time frame, most of the peer-reviewed literature reviewed (because of our search parameters) dated from 2010 to 2016 (with approximately 20 articles per year for each of these years), however a few foundational documents dated back to 2007.

By far the largest proportion of literature was from first authors based in the United States (N=104 79.4%), followed by seven (5.3%) for the U.K., five (3.8%) for Canada, three each for Germany and Spain (2.3%), two each for the Netherlands, Australia and Finland (1.5%) and 1 each for Austria, Luxembourg and Romania (.76%). The differences between the U.S. and Canada are not trivial on key issues related to school violence such as availability of guns (and in particular automatic guns), race relations, and street violence more broadly. Many articles referenced American laws and regulations that do not apply to our context. Despite the necessity of remaining mindful of generalizability, it is reasonable to assume that the overarching principles of STA as well as many specific study findings regarding STA have relevance for our context, although arguably the level of need for such programs may be lower given the presumed (in the absence of complete statistics) lower rates of violence.

Usability ratings were made on each peer-reviewed article; which were a combination of relevance and quality of the research presented. Thirty (22.9%) of first and second round articles (not textbooks) were rated high for usability; 33 (25.2%) were rated medium and 68 (52%) were rated low. More weight was put on the highly-rated articles in the write-up, but all documents are included in the Bibliography.

In terms of content, many papers throughout the date range, focused specifically on the phenomenon of targeted school violence (e.g.[1]). This is probably due to a high volume of publications on this topic in the recent past but also due to our selection criteria, as we were interested in these events as the precipitating phenomena for STA. Early papers focused on individual-level 'causes' but there is a clear evolution over time toward a more complex and broader understanding of targeted school violence[13, 14]. For example, Lenhardt and colleagues (2010) have gone beyond the tradition of studying perpetrators by examining characteristics of school environments in school shootings[15].

The School Security Literature

A new, specific multi-disciplinary field of investigation about school violence called '**School Safety and Order'**[4,16] which is most relevant to our review of STA, arose from this early work. Leading researchers in the field report that the term 'school violence' was found in almost no articles in the late 1970s to over 15,000 in 2009[4]. Papers from this field predominantly informed the review. Researchers are now actively examining organizational and inter-personal variables (as well as individual variables) in school violence[e.g., 17,19], key terms (such as violence, bullying, aggression) are being defined, and behaviors are now being seen as falling on a continuum from minor verbal insults and social exclusion through more extreme forms (e.g., weapon use, assault, and gang-related violence)[4,16,19]. Mayer and Furlong (2010) write that there is a dynamic tension in the field around whether the emphasis should be on horrific single events or more common/chronic events such as bullying[4].

Progress is being made on data collection but a complete epidemiology of school violence has not yet been achieved[4]. As of 2010, a unifying theoretical framework that encompassed the complexity of the phenomenon at multiple levels, with attention to development was not yet in place, with researchers referencing all of social-emotional, developmental, social information processing and public health theories[4,20]. A range of approaches to prevention are being examined. While evidence-based practices are available, how to achieve the best mix of universal and targeted programs is not yet known, and issues such as cost-effectiveness (outside controlled settings), feasibility and sustainability are under-studied. An ongoing challenge in prevention is balancing physical and psychological safety, and outcomes, including unintended effects, need to be measured in multiple domains (safety, social-emotional health, educational achievement). Best practices for screening, assessment and intervention with at-risk youth are being developed. Currently school violence issues in relation to diversity (including in relation to special education and cultural variation) are not well understood. With respect to supports to students at risk of school violence, Cornell and Mayer (2010) note that "*Recent research highlights the need for improved interagency collaboration in the delivery of mental health and support services to students. A tension exists between integrated and independent efforts, where core mission and goals, resource-driven decision making, systems incompatibilities, turf battles, and lack of infrastructure to support interagency collaboration set the stage for problematic outcomes"*[4, p.9].

The importance of school violence research to education is articulated by Cornell and Mayer (2010): *"School safety is relevant to studies of the achievement gap, teacher attrition, classroom management, student engagement and motivation, dropout prevention, community poverty, cultural disenfranchisement, and many other topics in education research. In sum, safe and orderly schools are the sine qua non for efficient and effective academic programs"*[4,p.8]. Mayer and Furlong (2010) argue that solutions to school violence require improved collaboration and shared investment: *"It will be critical to articulate a practical and achievable vision for linking research, policy and practice"*[21 p.24].

The most comprehensive resource on school violence and safety found in the review was 'The Handbook of School Violence and School Safety: International Research and Practice' (2012)[22].

There are also two related and partly overlapping sets of literature relevant to a review of STA as a prevention approach: one on **bullying/bullying prevention** and one on **youth violence/ youth violence prevention** more broadly. Because of the large volume of this broader literature, we included papers on these topics *only* if they were major reviews and/or intersected with the more specific topic of STA.

Key Messages from the Bullying Prevention Literature

Enormous progress has been made in **bullying research and practice** in the past four decades[23], with a trend to the use of multi-level theoretical approaches that parallels the school safety literature[24], as well as more recent attention to measurement and data collection approaches[25]. Knowledge on the phenomenon of bullying and bystander behavior itself has advanced[26,27] as well as on intervention approaches. Several systematic reviews of bullying prevention programs have been undertaken, confirming the effectiveness of most[28-30] and illuminating the characteristics of programs that seem to increase effectiveness (e.g., more intensive programs involving parents, delivered by multi-disciplinary teams, and those which include disciplinary approaches and supervision). Bradshaw (2015) recommends a 3-tiered approach using the public health framework of universal, indicated and targeted interventions, and argues that bullying prevention programs are complementary to wider school climate approaches[31]. There is also more known about practical implementation issues at the school level and how to connect to broader community programs[32]. Hymel and Swearer (2015) summarize the state of the science on bullying prevention in a five-article special issue of the *American Psychologist* (May-June 2015)[23]. Despite this progress, some authors lament that there is insufficient understanding of bullying in diverse populations; studies confirm that victimization rates are higher in disabled students but that as yet, few targeted interventions are available for students with disabilities who bully or are victimized[24]. *"Schoolwide prevention programs should be evaluated for their effectiveness in decreasing perpetration and victimization of students with disabilities with an emphasis on long-term outcomes"*[24 p. 127]. Experts also call for cultural competence and diversity awareness training for teachers and parents as well as individualized behavioral supports for students. Other resources on the topic of bullying prevention are provided in Appendix 3.

Key Messages from the Violence Prevention Literature

The literature on **youth violence and violence prevention** (broader than bullying) is also important background for a considered discussion of STA. Our searches yielded many papers on this topic as well. The highest-level messages are noted here. First, in an authoritative and recent state of the science review, Bushman et al. (2016) outline the advances that have been made in our understanding of the phenomenon of youth violence including risk and protective factors, and confirmation that self-control can be taught[33]. Important lines of intervention include strengthening parenting skills, minimizing media violence, controlling access to weapons, reducing alcohol and substance use, and improving school climates. Reviews of evidence (involving more than 200 studies) confirm effectiveness of many individual and school-level interventions aimed at aggressive behavior and violence reduction (considerable overlap with programs aimed at bullying specifically are noted)[34-40]. Effective programs are available for all of behavioral, cognitive and social skills approaches. School climate interventions have also been shown to reduce violent incidents in schools[41,42]. As is recommended for bullying-specific programs, intervention is recommended on three levels/tiers (all students, those at risk for violence, and

those who are already exhibiting violent or disruptive behavior)[1,43]. Predictors of stronger effects are program fidelity, expert implementation, and programs aimed at older, and higher risk students. Intervention research studies are advancing in sophistication and interventions are becoming broader in geographic scope. Bonnell et al. (2014) describes a randomized controlled trial underway in the U.K. involving 6000 students in 40 schools which is examining cost-effectiveness of social emotional skills training and restorative approaches in reducing bullying, aggression, truancy and expulsion rates, and improving psychosocial outcomes[44]. Spiel (2011) reports on a nation-wide strategy for school violence prevention in Austria[45]. Innovations such as online training for school staff hold promise to improve efficiency of implementation[46]. Some notable resources were also found in the search. For example, the Prevention Institute lists proven and promising practices for effective school violence prevention and provides six recommendations 1) build a safe school environment 2) address substance abuse 3) conduct primary violence prevention 4) provide mental health services (preventative and treatment) both in school and in the community including early childhood psychosocial and emotional development programs, (5) education reform, and (6) safe school policies[47]. A European Union publication: How to Prevent and Tackle Bullying and School Violence: Evidence and Practices for Strategies for Inclusive and Safe Schools (2016) also offers very recent comprehensive advice[48]. Attention to issues of diversity (and in particular in the Canadian context) were also notably absent in this literature. One exception was a paper[49] that reported on a large study of Indigenous students in Canadian schools that found that those in schools with more perceived violence had very high rates of psychological/nervous disorders. The authors concluded that these students were carrying a disproportionate burden of school violence and that more interventions were needed[49].

School-based interventions predominate in violence prevention, but there are advances in broader community-based approaches as well (e.g., the Centres for Disease Control public health approach)[19,50]. Experts point out that only 1% of violent deaths among school-aged children occur in or on the way to school[19]. Once again multi-tiered and multi-level prevention approaches are recommended which include enhancement of protective factors and not just intervention on risk factors. There is also evidence for effectiveness of some community-based violence prevention approaches implemented with fidelity[51,52]. In an examination of *both* community and school-level factors, Crawford and Burns (2016) recommend emphasis on bullying prevention, gang prevention and school climate[53]. There is also better understanding of the role of violence in the media and development of media literacy programs[e.g.,54,55]. There is less known about how to effect change at the policy level and the role of collaborations in effecting such change[56]. A very useful resource about community-level youth violence prevention, is the recently published document from the Centres for Disease Control "Preventing Youth Violence: Opportunities for Action" (2014) that recommends approaches that include both school and community[57].

There was a paucity of literature on some subtopics that were of interest, such as Canadian safe school policies systematically compared across provinces or school districts, cultural competence and disability issues in relation to STA and, in particular, the need for and the effectiveness of various school violence prevention approaches including STA *in the Canadian context*. There were no papers on systematic needs assessment for violence prevention programming more broadly or STA more specifically. Nor were there any papers discussing ethics and privacy issues related to STA which would guide best practices for inter-agency information sharing protocols in any of the literature found; and very little information on inter-agency structures to plan and govern school violence prevention and STA.

5. Findings

School-level Violence Prevention Approaches

Approaches to prevent school violence including STA are many and varied. In this section, a brief overview of the evidence and related key messages will be presented for five of the most frequently discussed approaches (other than programmatic approaches discussed in the previous section): physical security, school discipline policies, other administrative policies, police partnerships, and peer reporting, to provide the necessary background for discussion of STA in the next section.

School Discipline Policies and Approaches

One of the initial approaches to prevent school violence was 'zero tolerance' (ZT) which had its origin in the 1994 U.S. Gun Free Schools Act, and stipulated a mandatory minimum one-year expulsion for any student in possession of a weapon in school. This policy has been shown in many studies to be ineffective (including the findings of a major American Psychological Association (APA) Task Force in 2008[58] and in court judgements) and to have adverse consequences including inadvertent expansion to trivial behaviors including threats, disproportionate and unfair application to minority students, student perceptions of unfairness, perpetuation of maladaptive behavior of expelled students, and a lost opportunity to redirect students having difficulties[4,5,36,39,43,58-64]. ZT has come to be understood as *"policies in which both major and minor infractions are reprimanded severely, even at first offense and regardless of individual circumstance"*[65p.556] and is considered to be out of alignment with modern developmental and behavioral psychology[61,62]. The APA review authors concluded that *"research-based prevention practices hold a great deal more promise than zero tolerance for reaching our shared goals of safe schools and productive learning environments."*[58 p.860]. Alarm about continuing high rates of in-school arrests and expulsions have resulted in several recent initiatives to try to redress the unintended effects of ZT and related practices[61,65,66]. The province of Ontario ended ZT as a policy in 2007[67], and the U.S. Department of Education urged schools to abandon ZT in 2014[67]. Fortunately, more sophisticated alternatives to ZT and related harsh, exclusionary approaches have been developed and positive evidence is accumulating[43]. They include proactive, graduated, developmentally appropriate discipline approaches, usually implemented in concert with classroom management and whole school approaches. Some versions include restorative justice (RJ) and mediation approaches and some integrate social emotional learning and programs like School-wide Positive Behavior Supports[43]. Principles include strengthening relationships, fair and respectful treatment, and modeling and teaching self-discipline. A full issue of the Journal of School Violence on these methods was published in 2012 and many papers in the review described them in detail[4,5,39,43,62,63,65]. Positive findings (including cost-effectiveness) have been found in a review of RJ approaches in adult offenders[68], and restorative practices are being examined for the school context in greater depth in recent research. McCluskey (2011) defines restorative practices as *"restoring good relationships when there has been conflict or harm"*[69p.3] and cites evidence from the U.K. that outcomes include calmer schools with a strengthened ethos, and reductions in suspension and truancy. The authors also caution that some teachers have concerns about these approaches and that there is still a need to address systemic and structural reasons that can contribute to disruptive behavior. Recent descriptions of these approaches include conceptual analogies to the parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and negligent) described in the 1990s[70] with the 'authoritative' school climate as the ideal. An authoritative school climate is described as an environment with consistent rules, implemented with fairness and respect[71]. One recent study has

provided empirical support for the association between perceived fairness in discipline and reduced negative behaviors including fighting and weapons possession in school[72].

Other Administrative Policies

A range of school policies including school dress codes, parental involvement, hall passes, visitor sign-in, parking lot, and leaving grounds rules are all listed to have been used as approaches to reducing school violence. Very few studies were found that tested these approaches, although some (e.g., visitor sign-in) are considered to be common sense approaches that are perceived to be beneficial[36]. Perumean-Chaney and Sutton (2013) found no association between these approaches and students' *perceived* safety[73]. Granberg-Rademacker and colleagues (2007) reported some positive effect of school uniforms and parental involvement in schools but the study design was relatively weak[74].

Physical Security

The list of physical security options (also called 'target hardening' and 'building security') described in the literature we reviewed is long, and includes surveillance cameras, random searches, metal detectors, closed circuit television, solid doors, interior door locks, active shooter drills, reduced interior windows, communication devices, duress alarm buttons, night vision cameras and even more presumably rare and extreme options such as bomb sniffing dogs, child-sized bullet proof vests and arming teachers. Most authors described the evidence for these approaches to be scant, and mixed at best[4,5,16,20,36,74-76]. Some point out that security equipment was already in place in some school rampages[15], and point to evidence for unintended effects such as raising anxiety in students[5], increasing negative attitudes towards authorities[71] and disproportional use in minorities (e.g., in the use of metal detectors)[77] and opportunity costs for more effective approaches[78]. In a study of more than 13000 students from 130 schools, Perumean-Chaney et al (2013), students reported feeling less safe in schools with metal detectors and total number of security measures, but not locked doors or visitor sign-in procedures[73]. Media coverage of mass killings has been criticized for creating 'moral panic' (defined as an inflated sense of alarm over a perceived threatening trend) which fuels demands for immediate security solutions which may distract from developing effective approaches[79]. Martin et al. (2013) characterize some of the more extreme physical security measures as 'fear-driven approaches' that send students a message that the world is not a safe place[80]. She cites the 2008 School Community Safety Advisory Panel (for the Toronto District School Board) which noted that the needs of at-risk youth must be addressed through engagement and support to address problems of violence and related problems such as school failure, substance abuse, and suicide.

School-Police Partnerships/School Resource Officers

The presence of law enforcement personnel (including extra patrols in schools, or school-based security resource officers (SROs) in schools) has increased in the past couple of decades as well[36]. Authors note that effectiveness is not well established and there have been concerns expressed about criminalization of student misbehavior, increased arrests, possible rights violations, and a 'pipeline to juvenile justice services'[20,36,63,81,82]. Other authors indicate that these partnerships can be very positive, where careful thought has been given to program aims, roles and responsibilities, and with appropriate training and resources[5,81,82]. Theriot and Cueller (2016) provide several points of guidance to ensure effective programs[81]. Probation officers have also been placed in school settings in some instances, but, according

to Carbino (2010) the effectiveness of these partnerships has not been established[36], and we found no more recent literature on this topic.

Peer Reporting

Strategies to encourage peers to report information about potential violent events before they occur are predicated on the observation that in most targeted school violence events, the perpetrators expressed their plans or intensions in ways that became known to third parties (usually other students). This phenomenon is called 'leakage'[83] and is defined as *'communication to a third party of intent to do harm to a target"*[83 p.513] and can be in written form as an email, text, letter, essay, diary entry or in other forms (poetry, drawings). Commonly third parties did not report their observations to authorities because they did not feel the perpetrator would act on the intent, they did not feel that school authorities or other adults would take action, or they feared retaliation[84]. Research on leakage has revealed that the behaviors/motivations of both parties are complex, but eight specific types of warning behaviors have been identified. Leakage has also been shown to be more common in adolescent vs. adult perpetrators[36,84,85]. Authors have generally felt that mechanisms for anonymous reporting could be useful[33,85] in concert with trust-building school climate approaches that ensure that students feel they can confide concerns to an adult. Payne and Elliott (2011) describe the Safe2Tell reporting system in Colorado which is connected to school climate approaches[86]. Safe2Tell required some regulatory changes to protect anonymity[86,87]. It has comprehensive follow-up and extensive educational/promotional components. While there is no formal evaluation to date, lots of field data have been collected, confirming that between 2004 and 2011, over 3000 credible tips were processed and 28 likely school attacks were averted (in that the investigation uncovered weapons or explosives, hit lists and/or letters of intent). The report line has also enabled responses to a wide range of concerning behaviors from bullying, drugs/alcohol, violence/guns, gang activity, thefts, vandalism, animal cruelty, and self-harm; with 83% of serious issues resolved positively. Most authors indicate that more systematic research on leakage and special reporting approaches is needed. Observations about leakage dating back to early studies of rampage shootings suggested the potential for preventing future events and led to official recommendations for the development of team-based strategies to respond to threats and reports of threats[88], which have evolved into contemporary STA approaches[1,15].

Threat Assessment

History of Threat Assessment

Threat Assessment (TA) (also called Violence Threat Risk Assessment) approaches originated in law enforcement strategies related to threats against public officials, and they have also been adapted for workplace violence[5]. Studies of targeted school violence in the late 1990s revealed two important findings that resulted in U.S. federal agencies recommending development of TA strategies specific to the school context[89]. The first was that trying to identify characteristics of students that could predict violent acts (i.e. profiling) was largely futile and counterproductive[36]. The second was that reasonably clear expressions of threat were present in most tragedies, which could be the foundation for prevention[1,2,4,15,83]. Officials noted that *'Once a threat is made, having a fair, rational and standardized method of responding is critically important"*[89p.18]. The first adaptation of TA for preventing school violence was developed by a research team led by Dr. Dewey Cornell at the University of Virginia[4,11,90]. In the 15 or so years since that time, research and practice has advanced considerably on Student Threat Assessment (STA) in concert with related school violence prevention approaches.

Student Threat Assessment – Definition and Key Principles

Student Threat Assessment has been defined as a systematic process of *"gathering facts about a threat and making a determination regarding the likelihood that the threat will be carried out"*[91p. 71], "*a process of evaluating individuals who threaten to harm others, or engage in threatening behavior, to determine whether their behavior demonstrates serious intent to carry out a violent act"*[5p.219] and "*a problem-solving approach to violence prevention that involves assessment and intervention with students who have threatened violence in some way"*[92p.13]. It is distinguished from profiling in that it attends to manifest behavior rather than personal characteristics. It is concerned, not just with the fact that a student has ***made*** a threat, but with the likelihood that a student actually ***poses*** a threat and the actions that are necessary to prevent further escalation[11]. The originators of STA have conceptualized it as part of a comprehensive model of school violence prevention that includes school climate approaches as a tier one intervention (all students), with STA as an intervention at tier two (at-risk students) and tier three (students who are already expressing concerning behavior) and a caring respectful climate that encourages reporting of threats[5,76,90,93]. STA is also considered to be antithetic to zero tolerance as it takes the context/circumstances of the threat (including developmental level of the student) into consideration, and discipline is graduated according to the seriousness of the threat[93]. It focuses effort on understanding the meaning and context of threats such that the root problems can be addressed. While it is acknowledged that no approach is entirely predictive, threats are considered to be a starting place for addressing risk rationally and systematically[93]. The rationale for STA has been presented by Teffane (2002)[89]:

- To make sure all are safe through school violence prevention efforts;
- to assure that all feel safe in the aftermath of a threat;
- to assure supervision and/or treatment of the threatening student; and,
- to avoid using disciplinary approaches only, as this may exacerbate the danger.

In terms of collaborative structures for planning, oversight and setting policy for STA, there was a disappointing lack of information found in the search. One study used survey data to measure community involvement in school safety planning more broadly[82]. Community agency involvement was defined as presence or absence of law enforcement, juvenile justice, social services, health/mental health business, foundations, youth support groups and family service organizations. Law enforcement was the only service associated with the frequencies of various crimes and whether the school had a violence prevention program. Unfortunately, the study was not able to examine the type or quality of involvement. One website found in the grey literature search describes an alternative structure for STA, which is provided as a regional mental health emergency outreach with specialized expertise in TA and which provides rapid response to schools and colleges in a defined geographic area in Los Angeles. The service has formal memoranda of agreement with the school district and district police[94].

Several papers in our review were also found on the topic of ***post-event*** crisis response models covering topics such as specific models and cultural competency[4,95,96,97,98] but they are not discussed further here because, for the most part, they are reactive rather than preventive[36;92].

Student Threat Assessment Approaches in Detail

In the materials located for this review, only three distinct STA assessment models that provided at least basic details of their process were identified: **The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG)**[11], the **Dallas Threat of Violence Risk Assessment (DTVRA)**[99], the **Networks Against School**

Shootings (NETWASS) Program in Germany[1;76,100]. One author from Finland describes the collection of school violence threats in that country but no other details on an approach, if present there, are provided[101]. The grey literature searches yielded many references to implementation of the Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) approach in Canada, including in Alberta schools and communities. These have been supported by training from the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response (CCTATR)[102], but there were no detailed descriptions of this approach found in the literature, or any connection with formally published models. There is mention on the CCTATR website of VTRA *protocols,* which are described as mechanisms for timely sharing of information needed for STA while protecting privacy and ensuring interventions are actioned[102]. The grey literature searches also yielded information about two other TA-related training programs; one which described a STA system in a school system in Oregon[103] and one referencing a book dating back to the year 2000[104], but since the was no peer-reviewed literature on these approaches, they are not described further here. Key details of the three identified models are provided here; further details can be found in cited references.

The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG) were developed using a stakeholder consultation process and were first published in Manual form in 2006[11,93]. In this approach, a threat is defined as *"an expression of 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 ("You better watch out" or "If I wanted to I could blow this place up"). Illegal possession of weapons should be presumed to indicate a threat unless careful investigation reveals otherwise (e.g., a student accidentally brought a knife to school)",* and instruct STA teams *"When in doubt about whether a student's behavior is a threat, evaluate it as a threat."*[92p.25]. The VSTAG structure is set out as school-based multi-disciplinary teams with a minimum composition of principal or assistant principal (as lead), police/SRO, and school psychologist/social worker/counselor) with defined roles and responsibilities. Several advantages of being school-based are noted, including knowing the student and context in order to be able to implement effective behavioral plans and follow-up[105]. The STA process itself includes four levels of threat assessed in seven steps aided by a decision tree. In Step 1, specific details of the threat are documented; in Step 2, a team decision is made on whether the threat is transient or substantive. A relatively immediate local discipline response to transient threats is made in the third step. In the fourth step, a decision is made about whether the substantive threat is serious or very serious. Step 5 is a five-point response to a serious substantive threat. Step 6 outlines a five-point safety evaluation, and Step 7 is implementation of a safety plan. Because it goes beyond assessment and includes actions, the VSTAG model has been more recently characterized as 'threat management'. It has also been tested in the special education context, and more recently has included more of a developmental approach (Cornell 2011), based on the knowledge of qualitative differences in threats at different ages[93]. The VSTAG Manual contains many useful resources including threat documentation forms, interview questions for the student who made the threat and witnesses, behavior support plan templates, and case examples[11,93].

The Dallas Threat of Violence Risk Assessment (DTVRA) approach was described in only two publications; a textbook published in 2004[99] and a dissertation by the same author published in 2005[106]. The approach was developed in the late 1990s with a similar initial aim to the VSTAG. The approach begins with a determination (presumably by the principal) of whether the threat is 'terroristic' (direct verbal threat and means on hand to carry out) or 'non-terroristic'. If the threat meets the former definition, law enforcement is called immediately. If the latter, the risk assessment is undertaken which involves a low, medium or high rating on 19 risk factors based on information that is readily available to school personnel or collected via interviews. Suggestions for student interview questions are provided. The checklist is scored and an action plan for discipline and follow-up is developed based on the level of

risk computed (e.g., a high level of risk indicates that a call should be made to psychological services). Several limitations of this approach were listed by the authors, including the lack of established reliability and validity of the risk assessment instrument. An initial validation was undertaken as a dissertation published in 2005 using a small sample and case scenarios. Findings were mixed, especially for the most high-risk case scenario[106]. No other published information was located for this model.

In Germany, The Networks Against School Shootings (NETWASS) project[1,76] and the System Safer Schools[100] approach (also used in Austria and Switzerland) are underway. NETWASS has two components. The first involves comprehensive training of school staff to identify leaking behavior (broader than threats) and report incidents to a single responsible person in each school as well as the creation of a safe atmosphere to encourage peer reporting. This is done by reframing reporting as helping the troubled student receive support, protection and encouragement and destigmatizing their behavior. The second component is the STA itself, which uses a combination of behavioral risk and psychosocial risk. It is noted to be adapted from the VSTAG, but the process was not further described in the publication found. Because schools in Germany don't have school-based SROs or school psychologists assigned to individual schools, the process has a different team structure, usually involving one responsible person per school (typically the principal) and a cross-school STA team that deals with only the most serious threats. The police are not involved in the first stage because of German laws. Case management plans are put into place before disciplinary action is undertaken and they ensure follow-up after disciplinary action. There is also a help-line at which school personnel can get professional advice about threat identification and assessment. The intent is to apply the process to severe bullying behavior as well as threats of violence. At the time of this publication, the focus of evaluation of this approach was on the effectiveness of training, rather than the overall program[107]. System Safer Schools is a structure for violence prevention and crisis response[100] which also includes an automated risk assessment tool (described as a behavioral analysis tool) called the DyRiAS available only to trained clinicians for students who are already presenting the violent behavior characteristics typical of school shooters. Citations related to validation of the DyRiAS are published in German so the details were not further reviewed.

Assessment Tools for Student Threat Assessment

A reading of this literature reveals the close relationship between threat assessment and clinical risk assessment. Cornell (2014) outlines their common characteristics (they both assess a person's potential for violence, identify risk and protective factors, and recommend interventions) but also the elements that distinguish them[108] (Table 1).

Table 1 – Differences between Risk Assessment and Threat Assessment*

	Risk Assessment	**Threat Assessment**
Purpose	Institutional decision	Response to threat
Intended Victim	Often not specified	Usually identified
Time Frame	Often open-ended	Relatively short
Primary Goal	Accurate prediction	Prevention
Intervention Strategy	Primarily detainment	Problem resolution
Social Ecology	Often not considered	Goal to improve climate

* from Cornell, 2014 Student Threat Assessment: Not Your Father's Risk Assessment [SLIDES]

However, risk assessment tools may be useful to the mental health professional member of the team to inform the process and as part of more comprehensive assessment and treatment planning. Rappaport (2015) and Winer (2016) provide more detail on the role of the mental health professional in the STA process, whether they be school-based or clinic-based[6,109]. Advice about approaches to interviewing, mobilizing the student's resilience resources, assisting the school and family with ongoing care, and reporting responsibilities is given. When handled effectively, the authors contend that the STA process itself can be a therapeutic intervention[6]. A very rich resource for clinicians on a range of broader topics related to STA that was found in the review is 'Suicide, Self-injury and Violence in the Schools' (2011)[110].

Risk assessment measurement has evolved from a first stage where clinical judgement alone was used, to a second stage where structured tools using actuarial methods for prediction, to modern tools which combine both (called structured professional judgement (SPJ)) approaches[111]. Other than general reliability and validity, issues with youth violence risk assessment tools in the literature include gender applicability, applicability across settings (juvenile justice services and detention, acute care, mental health outpatient) and, most importantly for school-based threat assessment: applicability to broader settings including schools. Several studies confirmed the importance of including protective/resiliency factors in risk assessment for optimal predictive validity, in keeping with the trends toward strengths-based and trauma-informed treatment approaches[112,113]. Finally, authors caution that any violence risk assessment tool should not be used without adequate training and supervision[114].

Table 3 – Assessment Tools for Student Threat Assessment*

Name of Instrument/Authors	General Description	Evidence for Validity and Reliability and Utility
***Early Life Risk List* (EARL)**; LK Augimeri [115,116]	Separate versions for boys and girls under age 12; 20 risk items (6 family; 12 child and 2 responsivity)	• Good inter-rater reliability and predictive validity[116] • Preliminary psychometrics good[116] • Girls version has 21 items but not very different overall[116]
Hare Psychopathy Checklist (PCL:YV); A. Forth et al. [115]	20 items; not specific to violence	• Good concurrent, convergent, discriminative, and predictive validity[117] • Some evidence that not as useful for girls[115]
***Adolescent and Child Urgent Threat Evaluation* (ACUTE)** Copelan and Ashley [118]	27-item checklist for ages 8-18 years, rated by the assessor after interviews and collateral information collection. It provides several 'cluster' scores and a total score. The 8-item 'threat' cluster assesses risk within the subsequent 72-hour period. 'Precipitating factors' (13 items); 'predisposing Factors (14 items), and 'impulsivity' (11 items) are also included. The total score	• May be a useful framework for collection of information about the threat, but there is insufficient validation evidence to consider it a risk assessment tool for widespread use as yet[118].

	provides an overall level of threat.	
Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) Hoge and Andrews[115]	42 items for assessing risk and protective factors/strengths and need. 8 domains: offense history, family circumstances/parenting, education, peer relations, substance abuse, leisure/recreation, personality/behavior, attitudes. Scores are explicitly linked to service decisions.	• Some foundational evidence for reliability and validity. • Research not uniformly positive and may not perform well for girls[115]
Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) R. Borum et al.[115,116]	Developed from the adult HCR-20 for ages 12-18; 24 risk factor items in 3 domains (historical, social/contextual and individual/clinical) and 6 protective factor items. Takes 20-25 minutes to administer, designed for violence risk but also predicts non-violent re-offending. Multiple translations.	• Good to excellent inter-rater agreement[116] • Good concurrent validity[116] • Predictive validity in males in juvenile justice followed 12 months[112] • Content validity in males in juvenile justice[113] • Validity in high risk girls and boys (Canadian sample)[115] • Only minor revisions are suggested[114,115] • Very good validity in a systematic review that included 8 samples totalling 915 high risk youth[111] • Predictive validity in school setting for Tiers 2 and 3 STA[114] • Has additional value of assisting with decisions about risk management and effective treatment[111] • Guides matching of intervention to risk level so enables efficient use of resources[119] • Predictive validity over 4 years in 200 Finnish adolescents in juvenile justice; those with high risk ratings were 9x more likely to re-offend[120] • Predictive validity over 4-7 years in a community sample in the Netherlands[121]

* mentioned in articles found in the main search; focused searches were not conducted

** the German risk assessment software (DyRiAS) described in the previous section is not included here because of language barriers to detailed information

The review yielded a few other instruments that were not strictly violence risk assessment measures, but are worth mentioning because they address related concepts. Sullivan and Holcomb (2010) review a self-report instrument for issues commonly associated with acts of school violence that they note is not a risk assessment tool but may serve as a structured way to gather information to inform the process. It is the ***Psychosocial Evaluation and Threat Risk assessment (PETRA)***, designed for students aged 11 to 18 years. It has 60 items in the domains 'depressed mood', 'alienation', 'egocentricism', 'aggression', 'ecological' (includes family/home and school) and 'resiliency' (includes stress and coping). The tool has indicators to detect inconsistent and socially desirable responding[122].

Hopper et al. (2012) report on use of the ***Risk of Suicide Questionnaire (RSQ*)** originally designed for high risk populations) in youth from the community presenting to the emergency room. High volumes of false positives were found, and the authors concluded that it was not suitable for a low risk population[123]. This study illustrates the pitfalls of applying an instrument designed for one setting or population to another which is an important message about using tools in STA that have been validated in school populations. Finally, our review yielded several papers/resources on the topic of measuring school climate (which could be used for evaluation of STA and other interventions[e.g.,124]).

Evidence for the Effectiveness of Student Threat Assessment

The American Psychological Association (2008), noted that best evidence to that date supported a recommendation of school-based threat assessment but described it as an 'emerging technology'[58] at that time. The (U.S.) National Association of School Psychologists also now endorses STA[125]. In recent years, more research on the effectiveness of STA has been published, but our review found published reports *only* for the VSTAG model, which is summarized here.

Initial field work on VSTAG in 35 Virginia schools showed that only 1.6% of 188 threats assessed were found to be 'serious risk'[91,126]. None of these threats were carried out. A second field test conducted in 194 Memphis city schools (a system serving very disadvantaged communities), but using a centralized model, examined 209 threats in 103 schools and reported that no threats were carried out as well as positive findings on discipline outcomes. The studies to this point had no comparison groups. In a third study, a statewide survey of Virginia High schools found that 34% had adopted STA processes, some had locally developed STA and the remainder had none. Measures of school climate were compared by group. Those using the VSTAG reported less bullying, greater help seeking, fewer suspensions, and more positive perceptions of school climate. The findings were robust to adjustment for differences in school size, minority composition, socioeconomic status, neighborhood violent crime, and security measures in the schools. A fourth study examined 23 high schools before and after implementation of the VSTAG compared to 26 schools not using them. The study looked at training effectiveness via measurement of pre-post attitudes among 351 teaching staff and found improved knowledge of and positive regard for STA and intervention schools had lower rates of bullying and long-term suspensions. Students from schools using VSTAG had lower levels of aggression, lower long-term suspension rates, students that perceived that discipline was fairer, and teachers that felt safer. A three-year randomized controlled trial of VSTAG began in 2011, with 20 schools randomized to the intervention and 20 to wait-list control status. Students who had made threats in VSTAG schools were found to be about four times more likely to receive counseling, two-and-a-half times more likely to have a parent conference, one-third less likely to receive a long-term suspension and one-eighth less likely to be placed out of the school. Greater fidelity of implementation resulted in better outcomes. As a result of this body of evidence, VSTAG was listed as an evidence-based practice in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices in 2013[5,127]. It has been mandated for Virginia schools and a statewide evaluation study is underway; further findings document that suspension rates are down for both black and white students[92,108].

Student Threat Assessment in Canada

Our grey literature searches found references to STA dating back to 2001 for Manitoba in a presentation that described investigation of the school violence issue by the Education, Training and Youth Department[89]. The presentation provided a definition of threat from the Criminal Code of Canada, a rationale for STA in the context of an inclusionary philosophy *"inclusion is a way of thinking and acting*

that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe"[89p.55] and details of the process. Based on grey literature found, training on the VSTAG model has been provided to two Manitoba school districts in 2010 and 2015. The grey literature indicates that the lion's share of implementation of STA in Canada has been through the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response (CCTATR). We found no reports of evaluations of VTRA (the CCTATR approach) in the searches for this review.

Because our searches were focused on the term 'threat assessment' and very specific closely-related concepts, very little high, policy-level information was found. A Safe and Caring Schools policy statement from the province of British Columbia did come up, presumably because it contains very specific stipulation for the development of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency community protocols for "violence threat or risk assessment"[128]. According to the Alberta Education website, related approaches such as restorative practices, bullying prevention, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed practice are encouraged, but there is no mention of STA or school violence specifically[129]. The Alberta School Boards Association has policy statements against bullying, violence, and harassment but does not mention STA either[130]. The City of Calgary website has general information on preventing school violence and describes some related integrated school support programs including descriptions of police-partnerships and Crime stoppers[131]. Further information about the Alberta policy context for STA will be gathered and reported on in the next phase of the project.

Challenges and Innovations in School Violence Prevention related to STA

Very few papers outlined concerns about or challenges with STA as currently practiced. Once exception was Flannery et al. (2013) who raised a concern about barriers to sharing information among agencies that result from privacy legislation[2]. The recent Children First Act (2014) in Alberta, is enabling legislation for the type of information sharing among organizations providing programs and services to children that is necessary for effective STA. The other challenges raised by this author are about prediction of targeted school violence more specifically, rather than STA per se[2]. Cornell[126] outlines challenges with STA implementation, noting that VSTAG provides guidance for good team judgement, rather than specific prescriptions, and allows for some flexibility and local adaptation. He also notes that STA is an intermittent rather than routine process, so it takes time for members to gain experience and comfort with the model. An important challenge is in definition of the law enforcement role on the team; but this role is also viewed as being critical in the most serious assessment cases[126].

No articles were found that addressed cultural or diversity issues specific to STA, but one resource – the Handbook of Culturally Responsive Mental Health (2013) offers processes that are relevant to development in this area[132].

A few papers described innovations relevant to STA. Barzman et al. (2016) reports on the development of a process to analyze transcribed interviews for words or phrases that might improve prediction in current risk assessment approaches[133]. Bushman et al. (2016) discuss the potential of STA for the identification of youth at risk of suicide, not just those at risk of violence[33]. Finally, Cornell (2016) describes the development of a standard model of school-level safety assessment based on a comprehensive theory that draws together whole school including positive behavior approaches, proactive discipline, bullying prevention which is conceptualized as the 'authoritative school climate' and includes approaches to measurement at the school level. It also integrates outcomes related to the school's primary mission i.e. academic engagement, achievement and educational aspirations[134].

6. Compilation of Recommendations from the Literature

In addition to the findings on *specific* topics discussed throughout this report, several authors or organizations offered comprehensive recommendations on the topic of preventing school violence. The following are a selection of recommendations, either summarized or directly quoted, from the past decade, that seemed to best capture the 'wisdom' of this body of research and practice. This compilation of recommendations may help to offer a big picture view of the issues to be considered.

RAND Corporation (circa 2002): *"…school and district administrators have few guidelines to help them make informed choices among the myriad of alternatives. Instead, they are likely to make decisions based on such factors as the availability of program materials and training, cost, ease of implementation, and public relations issues such as how visible a particular tactic might be…. we owe it to our children to make sure that the methods we use to promote school safety will work. We cannot justify large amounts of taxpayer money for programs that feel good or that appear to be working according to testimonials of a few administrators, teachers or parents. Instead, rigorous program evaluation studies are needed."* Note: in the years since this message, the evidence base for approaches has expanded substantially and is available to inform decisions; still the quotation expresses an important principle[135].

Cornell 2007: *"More broadly, the foundation for a safe school rests on the creation of a caring community where students feel safe and secure. Safety and security derive from two conditions: (1) An orderly, predictable environment where school staff provide consistent, reliable supervision and discipline; and (2) a school climate where students feel connected to the school and supported by their teachers and other school staff. A balance of structure and support is essential, and requires an organized, schoolwide approach that is practiced by all school personnel. The good news is that there are effective programs and approaches, and threat assessment can help school authorities to use them effectively and efficiently by identifying student conflicts and problems before they lead to violence."*[90p.10]

Lenhardt 2010: *"Complex problems cannot be addressed with simplistic solutions."*[15p.11]. Recommendations (paraphrased) 1. Adopt an ongoing risk (threat) assessment model to identify and monitor students at risk 2. Provide sufficient staff and resources for the model (made up of diverse personnel and outside agencies). 3. Reduce school size to reduce alienation and lack of belonging. 4. Build mechanisms such that students trust they can disclose and anonymous reporting systems 5. Collaborate with parents; bridging from families to schools. 6. Build (broader) prevention programs into the schools – including anti-bullying and effective discipline policies 7. Expand the mission of schools to include social and emotional curricula; create a clear sense of belonging and investment in relationships; educate the whole child; build coping skills and approaches to combatting stressors[15].

Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence Statement 2012: Concludes that research supports a thoughtful approach to safer schools with four elements: balance, communications, connectedness and support. They recommended strengthening attention to, and supports for, mental health needs; structured threat assessment approaches, addressing youth exposure to violence in the media, and improved policies around gun safety[136].

Mitchell 2013: Discusses the *"powerful impact that caring school environments can have in increasing social emotional intelligence and learning"* [137p.9] and suggests that progress has been made in

understanding early trauma as a risk factor for generating and perpetuating violence but that we now have tools to address violence in more effective ways[137].

Schiller 2013: Develops a cogent argument for the importance of connectedness, acceptance and celebration of differences as a solution to violence[138].

Skiba 2014: Notes growth in knowledge about strategies and advocates for preventive discipline and three levels of intervention 1. School-wide (conflict resolution, improved classroom behavior management, social-emotional learning and parent/community involvement) 2. Threat assessment and support to students who may be at risk through mentoring, anger management, screening for mental health issues and teaching pro-social skills 3. School-wide discipline plans, individual behavior plans and collaboration across systems especially education and juvenile justice[62].

Cornell and Limber 2015: Recommends a strategy combining education, school-based interventions and policy reform. Argues that laws should protect all children from bullying (not just minorities), that students and parents should be educated…; that provisions to encourage reporting (incl. anonymous mechanisms) should be available; that threats should not be criminalized (unless they meet criteria for illegal behavior); that threats should be attended to by rapid investigation followed by progressive discipline, and counseling. *"School authorities should be leery of programs or strategies that are based on emotional appeals with no supporting evidence of effectiveness."* [139p.342].

Cornell 2015: "*The use of a threat assessment approach to evaluate individual student behavior in context and resolve conflicts and problems before they escalate into violence is one promising alternative…. School safety should focus on the everyday problems of bullying and fighting, and apply public health principles of primary and secondary prevention using well-established psychological interventions"* [140 p. 217].

American Psychological Association 2017: 1. Use STA approaches. 2. Implement violence prevention programs such as positive behavioral interventions and supports at three levels: a). Universal/school-wide and social-emotional learning in all classrooms b). Targeted interventions for children at high risk c). Intensive assessment and treatment for youth who are already engaged in serious violence. 3. Foster positive and safe school climates including restorative justice approaches and enhance partnerships between schools, law enforcement, public health and community to coordinate integrated comprehensive community efforts. 4. Facilitate program implementation through training and research; provide opportunities for staff training and networking. 5. Make sure school resource officers are trained in adolescent development. 6. Know that a focus on security and punishment are ineffective, counterproductive and often unfair to economically disadvantaged and minority students. Use evidence and best practices in violence prevention programs.[142]

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129. Alberta Education Safe and Caring Schools - https://education.alberta.ca/safe-and-caring-schools/safe-and-caring-schools/
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Appendix 1 – Definitions

- **Threat Assessment -** "*gathering facts about a threat and making a determination regarding the likelihood that the treat will be carried out"*[91]

- **Leaking (A)** – *"observable behavior or statements that signal intensions of committing a violent offense"*[143]

- **Leaking (B)** - *"communication to a 3rd party of intent to do harm to a target"*[83]

- **Violence** – *"violence is aggression with the goal of extreme physical harm, such as injury or death*"[33]

- **Aggression** – *"any behavior intended to harm another person who does not want to be harmed*"[33]

- **Bullying** – *"subcategory of interpersonal aggression characterized by intentionality, repetition, and an imbalance of power, with abuse of power being a primary distinction between bullying and other forms of aggression"* [23]

- **Threat (A)** – *"expression of intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. A threat can be spoken, written, drawn, posted on the internet, or made by gesture (e.g., gesturing to shoot someone"*[89]

- **Threat (B)** – *"an expression of 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 ("You better watch out" or "If I wanted to I could blow this place up"). Illegal possession of weapons should be presumed to indicate a threat unless careful investigation reveals otherwise (e.g., a student accidentally brought a knife to school). When in doubt about whether a student's behavior is a threat, evaluate it as a threat"*[11].

- **Risk Assessment –** *"is concerned with calculating how likely it is that antisocial behavior or criminal offending will occur"* [143]

- **Cultural competence** - *"a set of values, behaviors, attitudes, and practices that enables an organization or individual to work effectively across cultures; the ability to honor and respect the beliefs, language, interpersonal styles, and behaviors of individuals and families receiving services as well as of staff who provide such services"*[95]

Appendix 2 – Review Methods in Detail

General approach: 'rapid review', an adaptation of systematic literature review methods, primarily involving condensation of the review steps to fit the more abbreviated time-line typical of policy and practice-based research questions.

Research Questions:

What is the state of the art in violence threat risk assessment protocols for youth?
Do they work?
Are there defined best practices or essential components?

Audience: Calgary and Area RCSD internal stakeholders

Search Parameters (selected in consultation with a professional health librarian at the U of Calgary):

Peer-Reviewed Literature

Databases: Medline (health sciences), ERIC (education), SocIndex (sociology), PsycInfo (psychology), Social Work Abstracts (social work) and Criminal Justice Abstracts (justice)
Time Period: Initially 2007 – present but due to large volumes reduced to 2010-present
Terms: (combinations of: violence, threat, risk, assessment, child, youth, teen, adolescent, school-aged, juvenile, student, school, protocol, policy)
Other: English language

Grey Literature

Google

Terms: Violence Threat Risk Assessment Protocols, Violence Risk Assessment Protocols, Violence Risk Assessment Policy, Violence Risk Assessment Tools/Appraisal/Scales, School Violence Policy, School Violence Protocols, School Violence Tools/Appraisal/ Scales
Process: Each term was entered into Google, and all non-ad hits from the first five pages were selected

Canadian Health Research Index and Justice Research Index:

Terms: School Violence
Process: The term was entered into the search field and relevant hits were taken in order until the items were no longer relevant

Yield and Further Selection Processes:

Peer-Reviewed Literature

- The total yield after duplicates were removed was 1764 abstracts
- SL screened these abstracts to remove non-western countries leaving 1600
- CA and SL did a consensus screening of half to remove abstracts that were obviously off-topic e.g. issues of school/youth physical activity, obesity, pregnancy, smoking; or adults only and SL screened the remainder, leaving 824
- A set of instructions for selection including criteria for rating the abstracts for relevancy was prepared, tested and finalized (see below)
- 5 team members rated the first 150 abstracts – agreement was very good but including abstracts with at least 2 Yes ratings would have resulted in ~197 papers (still judged to be too many to review in the time frame)

- 4 team members provided ratings for the remaining 674
- 3 team members provided a second rating on the remaining 674; selecting all Yes's at this stage would have resulted in ~160 papers (still too many to review in the time-frame)
- SL and CA provided a second rating for this set; selecting papers rated Yes by both resulted in 108 selected papers
- A small number was added which had come up from the grey (Google) search resulting in 113 papers that were procured and printed for review

Second Round Peer-Reviewed

- References for the most highly-rated and recent papers (2015 and 2016) were reviewed for relevant items.
- Other papers from the author with the highest rated papers (Dr. Dewey Cornell).
- Tables of contents for the journal with the highest number of first round papers (Journal of School Violence) for the past 3 years.
- This second round yielded an additional 26 peer-reviewed articles.
- There were also 18 textbooks that came from both grey and peer-reviewed sources (some with certain chapters only relevant) that were selected and thereafter treated as peer-reviewed material.

Grey Literature

- The open internet was searched using Google (and 7 search terms similar to those used above). For each term, the first 5 pages of hits were taken (minus any ads).
- Two library-based databases were also searched (health policy and justice policy) using similar terms
- The 311 items (including books and book chapters) from these searches were screened by JP, SL and CA together for consensus selections.
- Peer reviewed papers that screened in were moved to the other set of materials.
- Materials judged to be simple 'resources' were moved to a resource file for tabulating.
- VTRA or VTRA-like protocols from other jurisdictions were moved to the resource file.
- VTRA protocols from Alberta were moved to our set of Protocols for the cross-mapping stage of the project.
- Remaining documents/website contents for write up judged as 'Yes' or 'Good Maybe's total 47 items.

The Review and Writing Process

- Materials were read in date order, from oldest to most recent. Key points for each first and second round item were extracted to notes and ratings of usability were made (LOW, MED, HIGH) based on both relevancy and quality of the paper.
- A rough outline was then created based on all topics arising in the notes.
- Then the review was written until all notes were exhausted, putting more weight on points from articles rated as HIGH for usability.
- Information from the grey materials and textbooks was then added, *only* where it added new information or insights not found in peer-reviewed articles.
- During writing, there was an occasional need to locate specific information such as definitions, or details of threat assessment instruments in order to fill an information gap in the narrative; this process resulted in the addition of 10 (mostly grey) literature items. There were also 2 papers that were found to not meet criteria once read (where the abstract had not revealed key information); these were removed.
- 143 items were referenced in the final report, and the total Bibliography included 969 items.

Abstract Rating Instructions

1. The questions for the review are:
   What is the state of the art in violence threat risk assessment protocols for youth?
   Do they work?
   Are there defined best practices or essential components?
   As we go through the article abstracts, **we are trying to flag abstracts that will best inform these questions**.

2. Rate each abstract according to the following scale:

   - Y* (***directly*** addresses the review questions – a critical paper)
   - Y (informs the review questions)
   - M (might possibly inform the review questions but less certain)
   - N (does not inform the review questions)

3. Use the attached relevancy rating criteria to determine your rating.

4. Print your judgment (either Y*, Y, M, or N) directly on the copy of the abstract **using the pen/ink color that is included in your package**. If you would like, please feel free to mark down any thoughts or comments related to your rating on the page.

5. Respond according to your **initial instincts** rather than agonizing as to your decision over each abstract. You should be re-reading very few. Remember that 4-5 other people will be rating the same set of abstracts. Even though we will all be "imperfect raters", the most important papers will tend to "rise to the top" through multiple ratings.

6. When **titles only** are present, please code these according the information in the title.

Abstract Relevancy Rating Criteria

Yes Abstracts

Protocols for assessment of and response to school violence is the **central focus** of the abstract. Ideally, they are protocols which connect to a broader system. The terms may vary – but the central concept is some kind of systematic approach to assessment and response. The idea is not just mentioned in passing, as a "motherhood and apple pie" comment, or with no further development.

- The population of interest is, or includes, primary and secondary school-aged children and adolescents – not only post-secondary students or adults.

- The abstract can be a **primary study** or a **review** of other work on the topic.

- The setting is Canada, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, the U.K. or Western Europe.

- The content must include students as at risk for or perpetrators of violence, not ONLY staff or outside individuals.

- The content can include **policy issues** related to protocols and/or **specific assessment tools** for determination of violence risk.

Maybe Abstracts

The content seems related to **protocols for addressing school violence perpetrated by students –** but is broader or contextual – such as risk factors for violence in youth, broader approaches to prevention of youth violence

OR

Is a topic related to school violence but only addresses a more narrow subtopic (e.g. bullying or dating violence)

The content includes violence risk assessment of youth in other settings e.g. juvenile justice, disability services, social services, health services or NGOs.

No Abstracts

The topic is related to violence but only in adult populations, including workplace violence, forensic populations or hospitalized individuals or services for family or intimate partner violence.

Appendix 3 – Resources

Threat Assessment Protocols

Please note the following protocols are examples found in the grey literature search, the inclusion of these protocols does not indicate endorsement.

Anglophone West School District. *Student Violence Threat Risk Assessment* http://web1.nbed.nb.ca/sites/ASD-W/Policies/Documents/700%20-%20Health%20and%20Safety/ASD-W-703-10%20-%20Student%20Violent%20Threat%20Assessment.pdf	2013
Board of Education of School District 63. *Community Threat Assessment Protocol* https://www.sd63.bc.ca/sites/default/files/CommunityThreatAssessment.pdf	2013
Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response http://www.cctatr.com/	2017
Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario. *Community VTRA Protocol: Violence Threat Risk Assessment* http://cdsbeo-www.azurewebsites.net/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/11/VTRA-OCT-5-2011.pdf	2011
Chinook School Division. *Community Violence Threat Assessment & Support Protocol* https://www.chinooksd.ca/Programs/safeschools/Documents/VTRA%20Protocol%20(October%202016).pdf	2016
Cornell, D. *Briefing on the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines* http://cascwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Virgina-Model-Threat-Assessment.pdf	2016
Cornell, D. *The Virginia Model for Student Threat Assessment* http://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib09/DE01922744/Centricity/Domain/156/virginia-model.pdf	2007
Government of New Brunswick. *Keeping Our Schools Safe: A Protocol for Violence Prevention and Crisis Response in New Brunswick Schools*	2001
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