



**THIS IS WHAT PREVENTION LOOKS LIKE.**

**Ordinary school days don't make the news. But that doesn't mean ordinary days are easy.<sup>1</sup>**

Washington's students face countless challenges and pressures every day at school, at home, at work and at play.

Although most students are able to cope with the stress, some turn to destructive behaviors to help relieve the pressure they feel. They might exhibit self-destructive behaviors like social isolation, cutting, substance use, and suicide, or they might focus their frustration on external targets and hurt people and property. On rare occasions, these students become violent at school.

*“When incidents of school violence occur, they leave a profound and lasting impact on the school, the community, and our nation as a whole. Ensuring safe environments for elementary and secondary school students, educators, administrators, and others is essential.”<sup>2</sup>*

A threat assessment system uses early interventions to keep students safe and engaged in school. At each level, teams work directly with students, families, and the community to provide wraparound supports designed to break negative patterns and steer youth in a positive direction.

**The Salem-Keizer Threat Assessment System (STAS)**

The STAS is an evidence-based, multidisciplinary system that can be used to identify, evaluate, and support students who present a significant concern or threat to themselves and others. When students are identified as potential risks to others, they are assessed using a two-level approach:

**Level 1**

The school-based Level 1 team includes a school administrator, school counselor, and school resource officer or other law enforcement officer. This team works to understand the threat, risk, and resources the school needs to address the situation.

**Level 2**

The multidisciplinary Level 2 team is called if the Level 1 team determines the situation to be high risk or lacks the resources to address it. This team includes educational service district and school district leaders, local mental health providers, and law enforcement officers. Representatives from other agencies, including the Office of Juvenile Justice and Child Protective Services, may be called in as needed to provide additional supports.

## Student-driven data

As you evaluate what your school or district needs to help its students succeed, consider how you might address some of the areas below. Each of these areas can impact how students are able to cope with stressors at home and at school.

### School climate:

- About 20% of students did not feel safe at school in the last month.<sup>3</sup>
- For some students, this meant missing out on important opportunities, including attending school—nearly 10% of students in grades 8–12 missed at least one day of school a month as a result of safety concerns.<sup>3</sup>

### Bullying:

- More than 30% of sixth grade students experience bullying at least once a month.<sup>3</sup>
- About 15% of students in grades 8–12 face cyberbullying at least once a month.<sup>3</sup>

### Suicide:

- Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for ages children and young adults ages 10–24 in Washington.<sup>4</sup>
- More than 20% of students in grades 6–12 seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months.<sup>3</sup>

The STAS is a tool each district can add to its toolbox. It goes beyond responding to threats to provide opportunities to refer students in need to important interventions, community services, and statewide support systems.

## Expanding threat assessment in Washington state

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Association of Educational Service Districts are partnering to implement the STAS statewide. Each of our nine ESDs will provide training and support to its local school districts.

This system is designed to offer trained, dedicated student supports to protect and provide wraparound services to our state's most vulnerable population: our children. These efforts for statewide standardization are supported by OSPI workgroups and committees including the School Safety Advisory Committee and the Preventing Mass Shootings Workgroup.

“*My agency will continue our efforts to increase mental health supports for students. We are seeking additional resources for school counselors, threat assessments for students believed to be at risk of suicide or other violence, and professional development for educators to better recognize students who are in need of mental health support.*”<sup>5</sup>

Chris Reykdal, State Superintendent  
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

### Threat assessment essentials

- Threat assessment is a structured, multidisciplinary group process used to evaluate the risk a person poses.<sup>6</sup>
- A threat assessment generally responds to an actual or perceived threat or concerning behavior.
- Protocols are designed to focus on situational variables.

### Main objectives<sup>2</sup>

- Identify and assess threats of potentially harmful or lethal behavior and determine the level of concern and action required.
- Organize resources and strategies to manage situations involving students that pose threats to other students and/or staff.
- Maintain a sense of psychological safety among students, staff, and families.
- Prevent targeted violence.

1. Some material on this flyer was adapted from information provided by the Oregon Task Force on School Safety in 2016.  
2. United States Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center, *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence*.  
3. Looking Glass Analytics, *Healthy Youth Survey 2018: Report of Results*.  
4. "Youth Suicide Prevention," Washington State Department of Health, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/InjuryandViolencePrevention/SuicidePrevention/YouthSuicide>.  
5. Nathan Olson, "Washington State Will Not Arm Its Teachers," OSPI, August 23, 2018, <https://www.k12.wa.us/about-ospi/press-releases/reykdal-washington-state-will-not-arm-its-teachers?printable=true>.  
6. John Van Dreal, *Assessing Student Threats Implementing the Salem-Keizer System* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 5.



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