



The New York State Center for School Safety

Providing support to schools, families, and communities

# Anonymized Threat Response Guidance

A Toolkit and Reference Guide for K-12 Schools  
*from the*  
Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency  
(CISA)



New York State Education Department



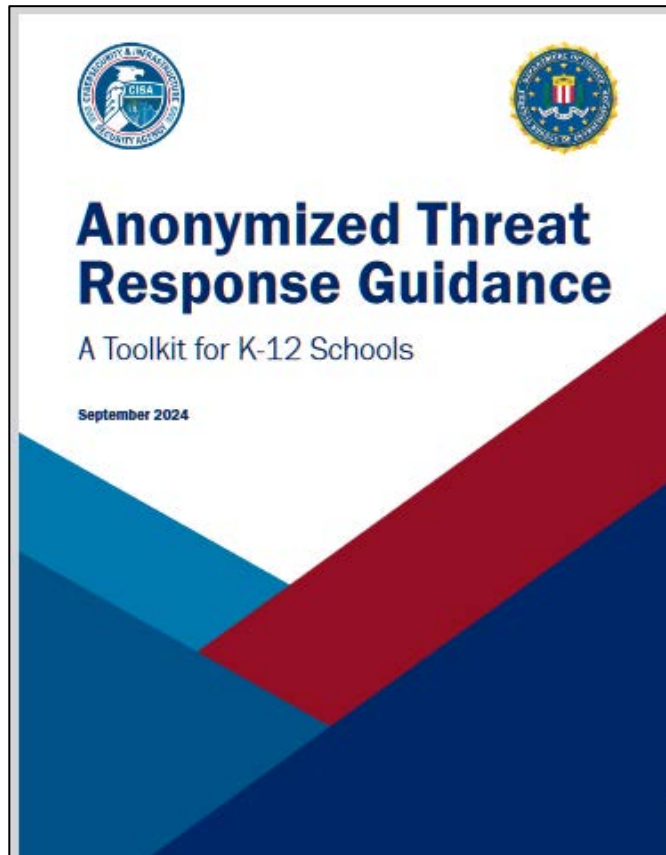
New York State Center for School Safety



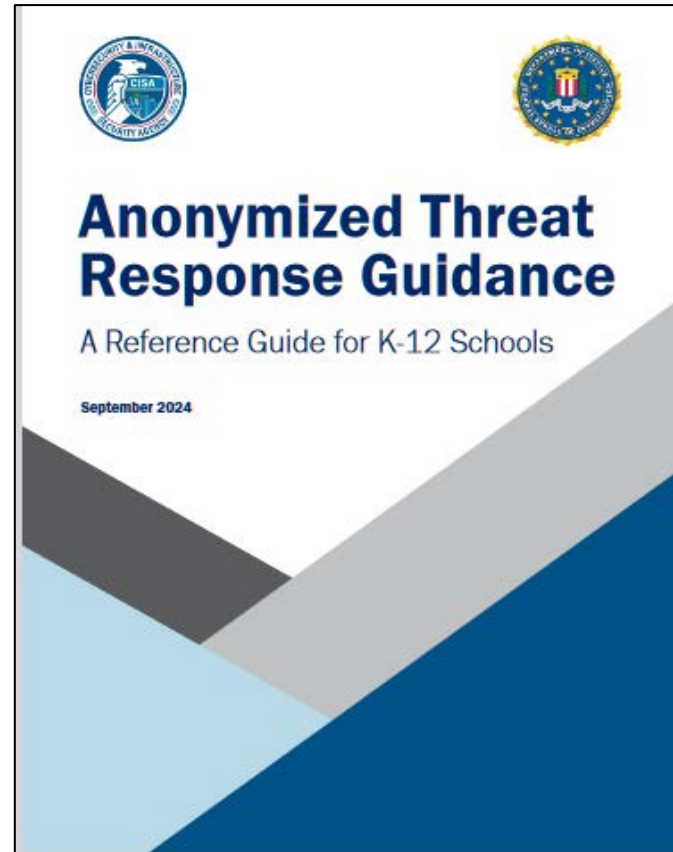
Virtual Community Norms for Active Participation



# Materials



[Anonymized Threat Response Guidance \(A Toolkit for K-12 Schools\)](#)



[Anonymized Threat Response Guidance \(A Reference Guide for K-12 Schools\)](#)




# Information Source



## CYBERSECURITY & INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY AGENCY

An official website of the United States government [Here's how you know](#) ▾


SchoolSafety.gov

About Topics Tools and Resources  

# Find Resources to Create a Safer School

SchoolSafety.gov was created by the federal government to provide schools and districts with actionable recommendations to create safe and supportive learning environments for students and educators.

[Learn More](#)





# Session Objectives

- ❖ Highlight key ideas from the CISA resources
- ❖ Network around current cybersecurity and emergency operations practices





# Introduction







# What is an Anonymized Threat?



Page 1

## ❖ Anonymized threats can:

- Be delivered by phone
- Use technology that masks numbers & distorts a caller's voice
- Utilize an anonymous platform
- Be in written form



## ❖ Identity of the individual is not immediately discernable



# Other types of Cyber Threats

- ❖ Social Media Posts
- ❖ Data Breaches
- ❖ Ransomware
- ❖ Cyberbullying
- ❖ Inappropriate Content
- ❖ Phishing







# Poll



❓ In the last 18 months, has your district been the target of an anonymized threat?



# Trends in K-12 Schools



Pages 5-6

- ❖ 95% of youth between the ages of 13 and 17 use at least one technology platform, and  $\frac{1}{3}$  report that they use social media “almost constantly.”

(U.S. Surgeon General’s Office, 2023)

- ❖ Between 2012-2022, law enforcement agencies were able to identify the individual making the threat in more than 65% of cases.

(Moore et al., 2024)





# Trends in Anonymized Threats



Page 4

- ❖ After high-profile mass shootings at schools
- ❖ Social media challenges
  - Come in clusters
- ❖ Random times during the school y
  - Testing season





# Anonymous Threats in New York



An official website of New York State

[Here's how you know](#) ▼



**GOVERNOR**  
KATHY HOCHUL

PRESSROOM

SCHEDULE

EXECUTIVE ORDERS

LEGISLATION

ABOUT

CONTACT



 **Public Safety**

OCTOBER 18, 2023 | Albany, NY

## Statement From Governor Kathy Hochul on Latest School 'Swatting' Threats



New York State Education Department



New York State Center for School Safety

# Five Preparedness Missions





# Before a Threat Emergency



Reference  
Guide p. 2

Flowchart Figure 1: **What To Do Before and After a Threat Emergency**

## What To Do Before a Threat

Build and maintain relationships with local first responders through regular communications and training.

- Conduct outreach to include police, fire and EMS.

Develop an emergency operations plan (EOP) that includes an annex specifically for anonymized threat situations.

- Train applicable school staff on how to use the EOP annex.
- Share and validate the EOP with police and other first responders.
- Update the plan annually.

## What To Do After a Threat

Provide access to resources to address trauma and stress.

- Offer counseling and other mental health services.
- Facilitate opportunities for community feedback.

Plan an after-action review of the emergency.

- Incorporate entities from inside the school community and other partners involved in threat response.





an incident or emergency



# What Are the Key Strategies to Address Anonymized Threats?

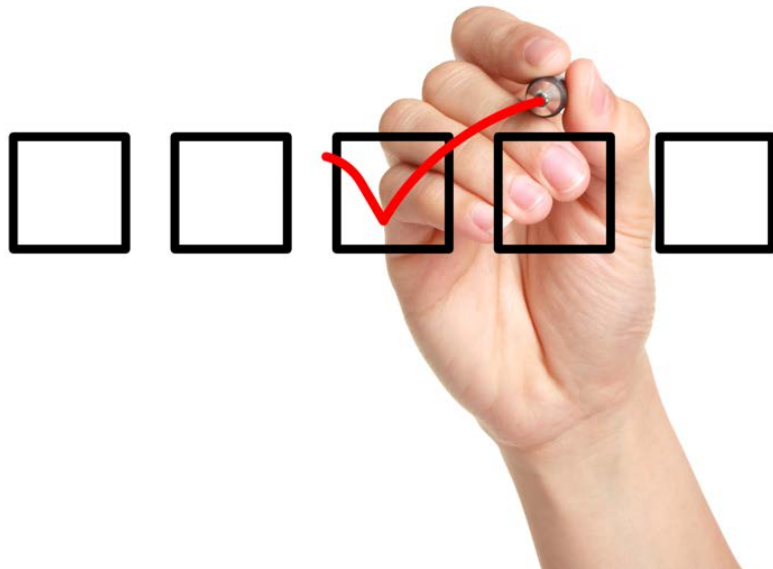
## **Key Strategy 1:**

Build awareness about reporting to detect threats early and deter future threats.





# Early Awareness and Deterring Future Problems



- ☒ Build awareness about reporting threats
- ☒ Prepare staff to capture key information
- ☒ Educate the community, especially families
- ☒ Provide mental health resources
- ☒ Take actions to deter future threats



# Build Awareness



Page 8

Key messages schools should share:

- “Report, Don’t Repost”
- Capture a screenshot of the threat
- Whom should you notify?
- Build awareness throughout the school year
- Include students, parents and staff





# Preparing Staff



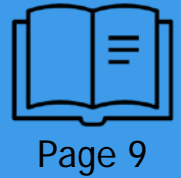
- ❖ Telephone threats provide an opportunity to collect information that can aid an investigation
- ❖ Provide staff with a checklist to record observations from a phoned-in threat
  - What was the threat?
  - Details about background noises
  - Characteristics of the caller, was the voice familiar?

[CISA Bomb Threat Checklist](#)





# Mental Health Resources



- ❖ Directing resources towards treating underlying problems is a more effective strategy
- ❖ Threats made by students are often indicators of other problems or student needs:
- ❖ In a positive school climate, students may feel more supported and encouraged to report
- ❖ Emphasize that **early intervention** is better
- ❖ Consider adding mental health professionals and other supports/programs





# Educating the Community



Page 9

12:08 65%

Making hoax threats to target and attack people at schools and other public places is a serious crime.

It drains law enforcement resources and causes distress or injury to first responders and victims.

It also costs the taxpayers a lot of money—up to thousands of dollars.

You can be sentenced to up to five years in prison for making hoax threats.

**IT'S NOT A JOKE.**

#THINKBEFOREYOUPOST

www.fbi.gov



# Taking Action



Page 10

- ❖ Establish multidisciplinary threat assessment teams
- ❖ Learn from existing practices
- ❖ Communicate potential consequences of making threats
- ❖ Conduct after-incident review to determine if changes in protocols or procedures are needed



# Taking Action



Page 10

- ❖ Build and maintain relationships with local first responders.
- ❖ Develop an emergency response plan (ERP) annex for anonymized threats.
- ❖ Conduct developmentally and age-appropriate drills.
- ❖ Create and maintain protocols for communicating with families during emergencies.



# NYS Key Resource:





## What Are the Key Strategies to Address Anonymized Threats?

### **Key Strategy 2:**

Develop a partnership structure that will help address anonymized threats.





# Establish Key Partners

- School administrators and staff will often be the first to know about a threat and determine immediate next steps (e.g. contact law enforcement, notify staff and/or parents, initiate emergency response protocol)
- Law enforcement is critical when it comes to responding to, investigating and assessing the level of concern posed by threats
- Mental health & threat assessment professionals provide supports to students and staff

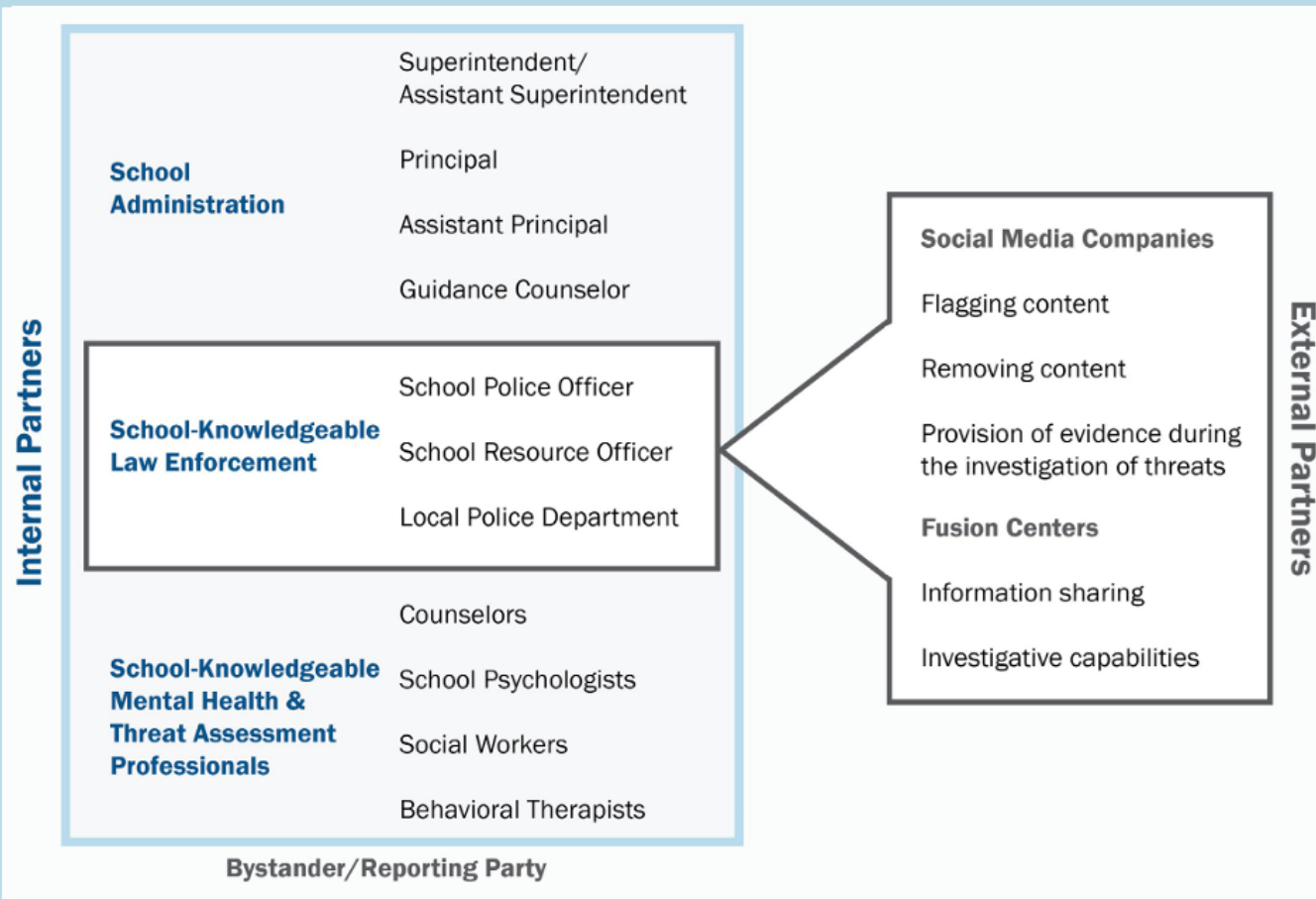




# Reporting Parties



Figure 3.1 **Potential Partners for Addressing Anonymized Threats Against Schools**





## What Are the Key Strategies to Address Anonymized Threats?

### **Key Strategy 3:**

Consider the inclusion of a multidisciplinary threat assessment team when addressing anonymous threats, and utilize their expertise if the subject who made the threat becomes known.





# Multidisciplinary Threat Assessment Team



Pages 12-14

- ❖ Brings together knowledge, perspectives and approaches from different fields to better understand the level of concern posed by a threat
- ❖ Members of a school's multidisciplinary threat assessment team may be able to play a key role in providing insight and context to anonymized threats



## Activity: Example Threat Scenario

Discuss what your district/school would do next...

*Students at an elementary school saw and circulated a threatening message written on the bathroom wall. School administrators were eventually notified and removed the writing, and a multidisciplinary threat assessment team was able to identify the student responsible.*

*What would your next steps be after receiving notification?*

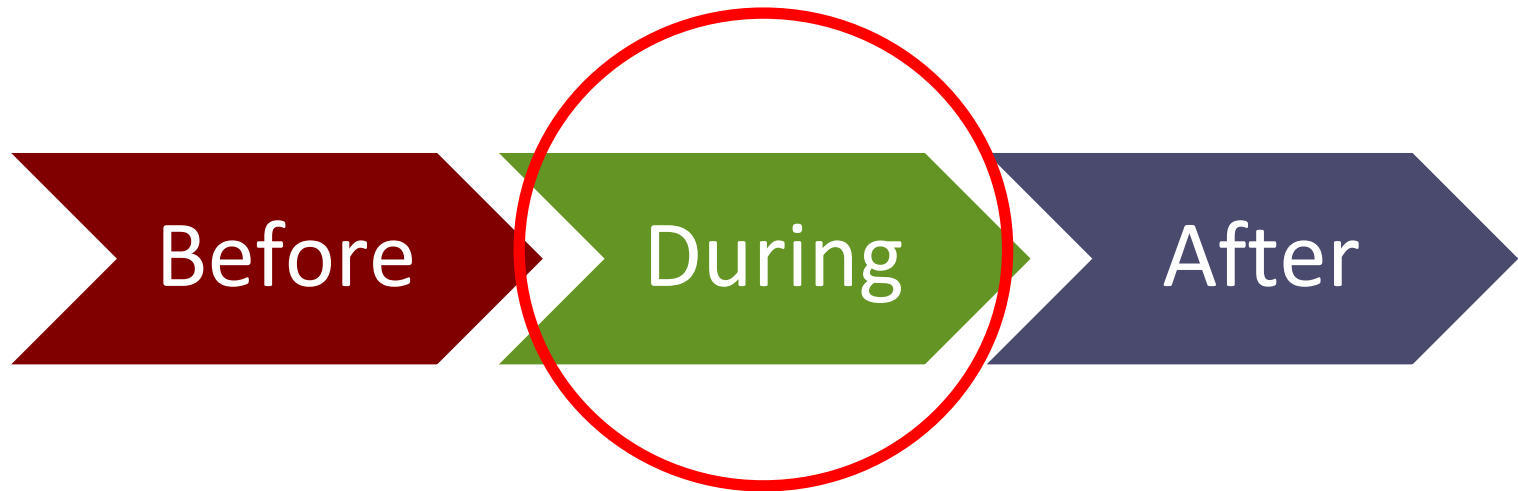




## Debrief

### District's Response:

The following day, the district superintendent sent the following message to the school community: "We are taking this incident very seriously and following the necessary protocols and safety precautions, including working with our school resource officers, local law enforcement and our district safety team. A longstanding practice in the district... involves us also doing a threat assessment for our students experiencing distress. This is underway as we send this communication. ...the safety and wellbeing of our students is our top priority."



an incident or emergency

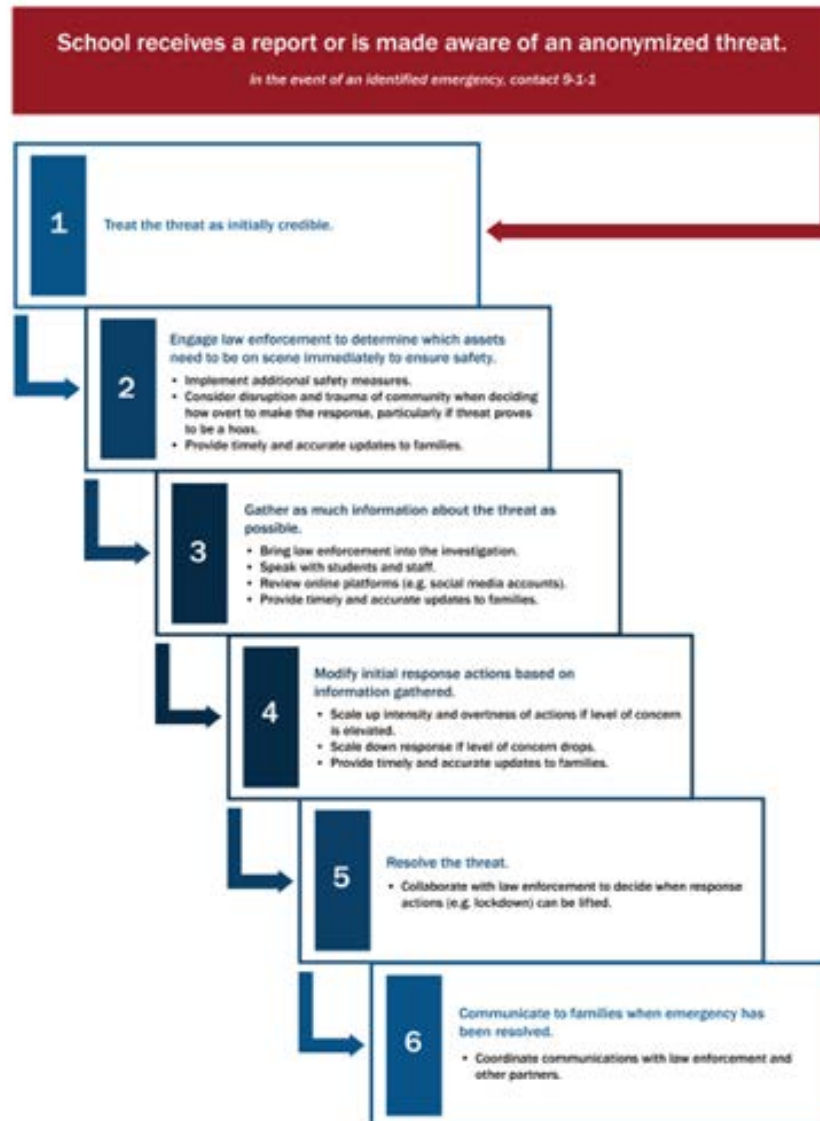




# What To Do During An Anonymous Threat Incident



Reference Guide  
Figure 2





## What Are the Key Strategies to Address Anonymized Threats?

### **Key Strategy 4:**

Balance initial steps in response to ensure the campus is safe.

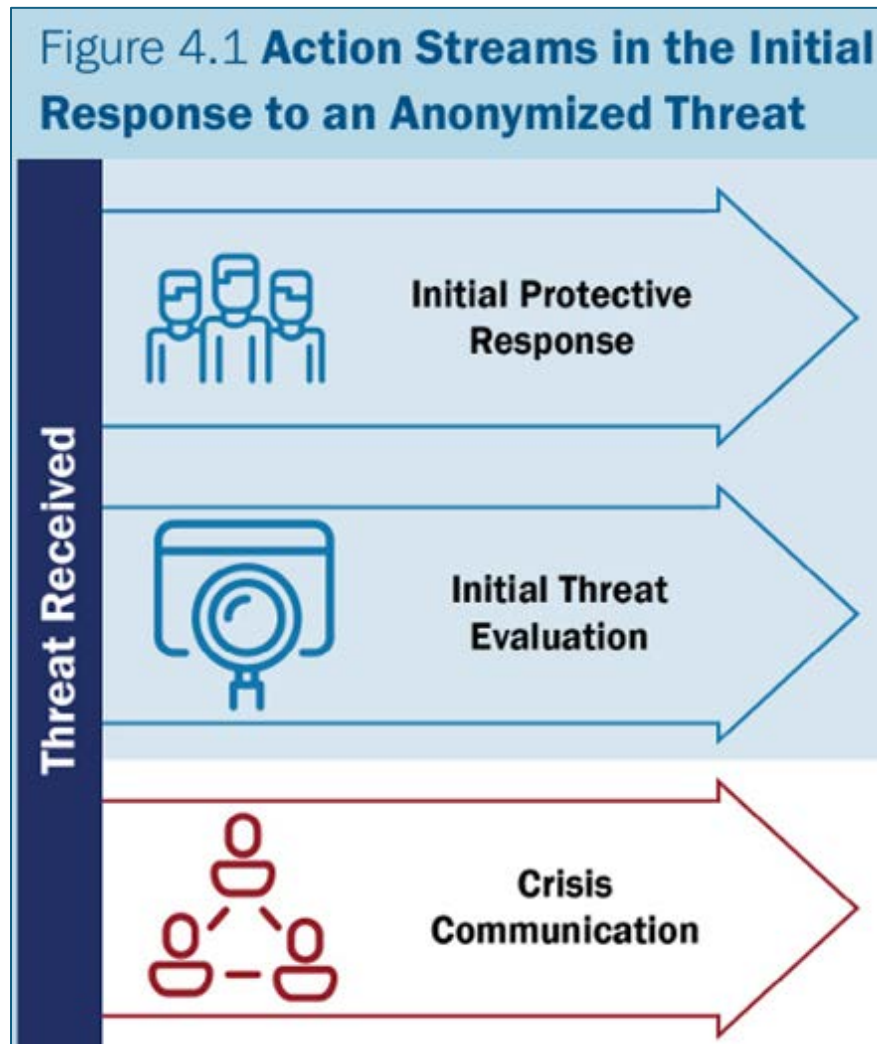




# Action Streams



Page 15





# Initial Response



Page 15

Responses should be:

- Specific to the information available
- Prudent to protect the school, but to still allow instruction and other everyday school operations to continue, when possible
- Prepared to rapidly scale up responses
- Started with actions that are minimally disruptive.



# What Are the Key Strategies to Address Anonymized Threats?

## **Key Strategy 5:**

Triage and determine the level of concern a threat poses.





# Threat Evaluation



Page 16

- ❖ When first becoming aware of an anonymized threat, school and law enforcement personnel involved use key questions to gather information.
- ❖ The goal is to assess concern based on the specific circumstances of the threat, including:
  - Background and contextual information
  - Patterns
  - Signs of imminence
  - Assessing level of concern



# Background & Contextual Info



Page 17

## Consider Background and Contextual Information

- How was the anonymized threat delivered? (e.g. Via social media? If so, what platform? Was it posted to a school or school-related social media site? Via phone?)
- Who is the target of the threat (named and implied)? Is the school in general a target, or is a specific individual or group of individuals the target?
- Does the anonymized threat name or reference any other schools, individuals, or organizations, and what is their relationship to the threat's primary target?
- How many anonymized threats have targeted the school or individual(s)? During what timeframe? (e.g. Was the school or individual(s) the target of other threats, for instance through different means like phone, social media, etc.?)
- Is this a single, isolated threat or part of a series sent to the same school or individual(s)?
- When did the school first become aware of the anonymized threat, when did the threat originate and how did the school receive notification of the threat?

(Simons and Tunkel, 2021)





# Detecting Patterns



Page 18

**Are the threats to the school or schools specific or diffuse? Consider factors such as target type, geography of the targets; timeframe of threats; and references to specific events, issues or modes of violence**

**Is there any evidence that the threatening individual is in close physical proximity to the target school(s)?**

**Do the threats appear to be recycled or copy-pasted from other threats targeting other schools in the local area, state, or nationally?**

**Are the threats targeting the school(s) associated with a significant event such as a school or other type of mass shooting or another violent event?**

**Does there appear to be a goal associated with the wave or cluster of threats?**





# Signs of Imminence



Page 19

- Statements about waning patience or “being tired”
- Indication the threatening individual’s opportunity for action is shrinking because impending death, arrest, or declining health
- Reference to violence being the “last resort”
- Implication that the threatening individual has prepared or issued a manifesto, last will, or other legacy token



# Level of Concern



Page 19

Figure 4.2 **Weighing the Level of Concern Posed by an Anonymized Threat**

Items in bold denote factors specific to anonymous threats.

## Factors Decreasing Level of Concern



### AUDIENCE

- Threat appears on social media platform not commonly used by youth



### FEASIBILITY

- Immature language
- Non-native English



### UNIQUENESS OF THREAT

- Multiple schools receive same or similar threat
- Recycled images, photos, language

## Factors with Unclear Impact on Level of Concern



### FEASIBILITY

- **Specific or personalized language easily available to the public**



### TIMING

- **Proximity in time to other violent incidents**

## Factors Increasing Level of Concern



### AUDIENCE

- **Broad transmission to many online followers**
- **Multiple independent reports of threats**



### ESCALATION

- Last resort language
- History of serious threats



### FEASIBILITY

- Specific attack locations, timing
- Specific weapons, tactics
- Suicidal intent
- Physical proximity to target
- **Focus on attack outcomes (e.g. casualty counts)**
- **Awareness of legal implications of threat**



### MOTIVE

- Prior relationship to target
- Personalized language



### WARNING BEHAVIORS

- Warrior/commando mentality
- References to past attackers



- Manage expectations
- Keep fear in check
- Avoid the viral spread of rumors





# Crisis Communication



Page 21

## Messages might include:

- The nature of the threat and date and time
- Actions by school officials and law enforcement
- Information about the outcome of the investigation (is it known that the threat is not credible?)
- Whether school is open or closed (if closed, lead with this point)
- What additional security measures are being implemented (e.g., more police on school grounds, security checks at building entrances, etc.)
- Who to contact with concerns
- Next steps



## Activity: Example Threat Scenario

Discuss what your district/school would do next...

*Shortly after 9 am, repeated announcements over a school's PA system notified everyone inside to lock down and turn out the lights and that it was not a drill. Within the next minute, police SWAT teams in full gear swarmed the school with weapons drawn.*

*The incident lasted about two hours until law enforcement was able to determine that the phone call placed to police of shots fired inside the school was false.*





## Debrief

### District's Response:

After police cleared the school and the lockdown was lifted, school district administrators sent the following email to families: "The lockdown has now been released and staff and students are safe. Swatting is a criminal harassment tactic of deceiving an emergency service into sending a police or emergency service response team to a school or other place. Swatting causes extreme disruption and can be dangerous. It is also deeply unsettling for anyone affected. This particular incident has impacted several schools and districts across the state today." School officials planned to debrief the situation with staff and students to ensure access to needed mental health support.

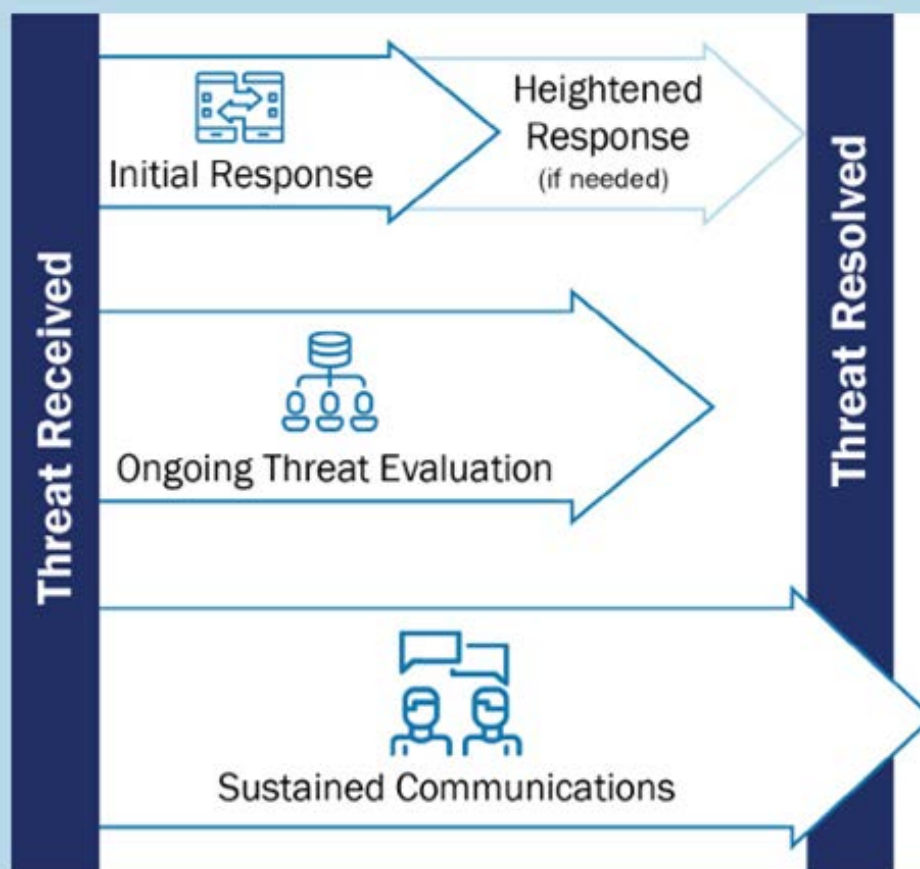


# Action Streams



Page 23

Figure 5.1 **The Evolution of Action Streams Throughout Response to Anonymized Threats**





# Balanced Response



Page 23

- ❖ Which assets need to be on scene to ensure a school campus is safe?
- ❖ What safety steps or response options are required to slow down the threat emergency?
- ❖ What options exist to scale up a response?
- ❖ What are the roles for school staff and local law enforcement personnel in the response process?
- ❖ Who will be in charge of the response?





# Plan for Response



Page 24

- ❖ Consider additional safety steps to keep buildings and campus safe
- ❖ These actions should all be specified - Standard Response Protocol (SRP)  
(*"I Love U Guys" Foundation*)
- ❖ Response actions can be sequenced or scaled down as necessary

## IN AN EMERGENCY TAKE ACTION

	<b>HOLD! In your room or area. Clear the halls.</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b> Clear the hallways and remain in room or area until the "All Clear" is announced Do business as usual	<b>ADULTS</b> Close and lock the door Account for students and adults Do business as usual
	<b>SECURE LOCKOUT! Get inside. Lock outside doors.</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b> Return to inside of building Do business as usual	<b>TEACHERS</b> Bring everyone indoors Lock outside doors Increase situational awareness Do business as usual Take attendance
	<b>LOCKDOWN! Locks, lights, out of sight.</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b> Move away from sight Maintain silence Do not open the door	<b>ADULTS</b> Recover students from hallway if possible Lock the classroom door Turn out the lights Move away from sight Maintain silence Do not open the door Prepare to evade or defend
	<b>EVACUATE! (A location may be specified)</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b> Leave stuff behind if required to If possible, bring your phone Follow instructions	<b>ADULTS</b> Lead students to Evacuation location Account for students and adults Notify if missing, extra or injured students or adults
	<b>SHELTER! Hazard and safety strategy.</b>
<b>STUDENTS</b> Use appropriate safety strategy for the hazard	<b>ADULTS</b> Lead safety strategy Account for students and adults Notify if missing, extra or injured students or adults
<b>Hazard</b> Tornado Hazmat Earthquake Tsunami	<b>Safety Strategy</b> Evacuate to shelter area Seal the room Drop, cover and hold Get to high ground

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K12  
2025  
STANDARD  
RESPONSE PROTOCOL



# Phased Approaches



Pages 24-27

- ❖ Add police or security personnel
- ❖ Restrict movement on campus
- ❖ Prevent weapons from entering campus

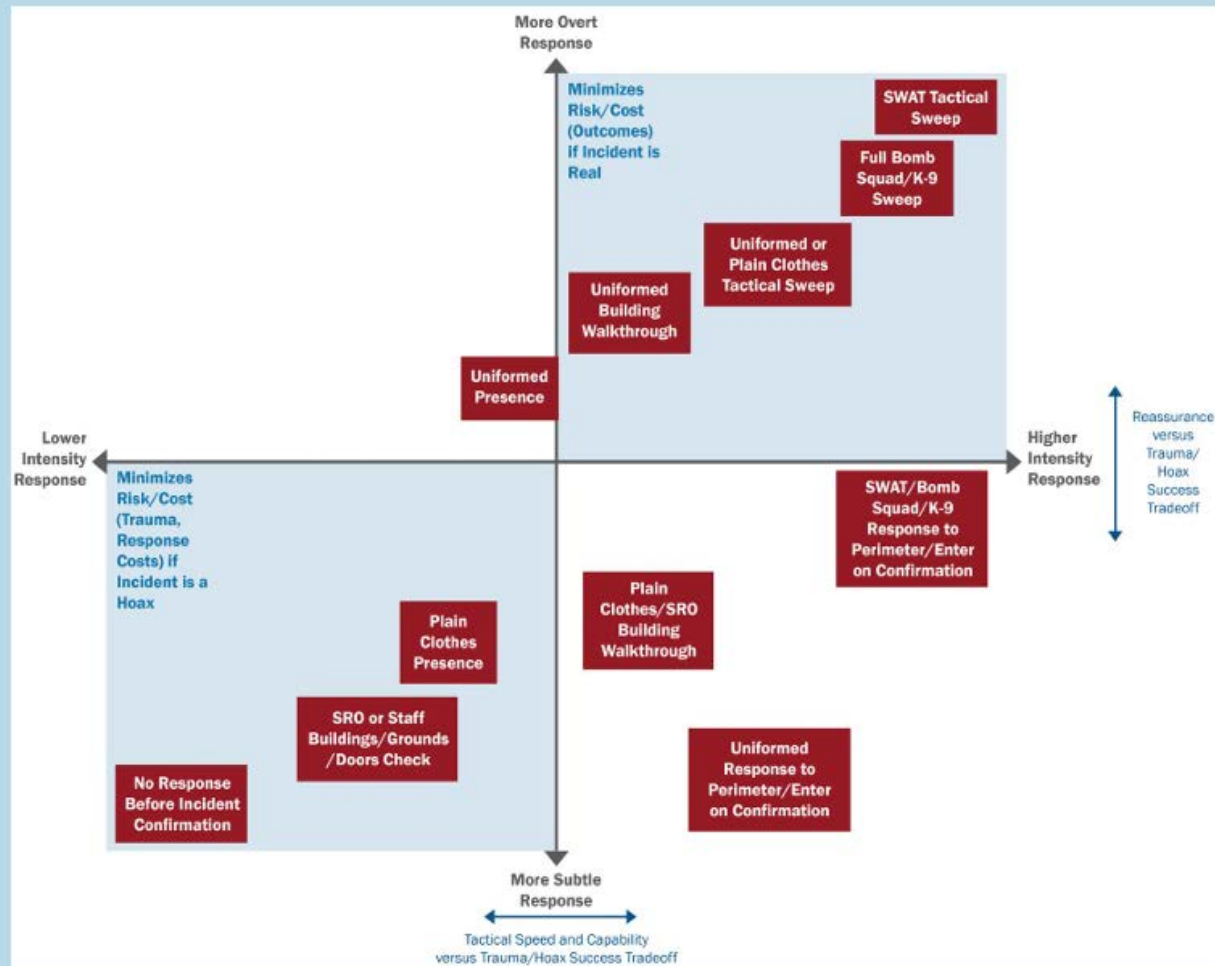




# Adding Law Enforcement



Figure 5.2 **Law Enforcement or Security Personnel Response Options for Threatened Schools**



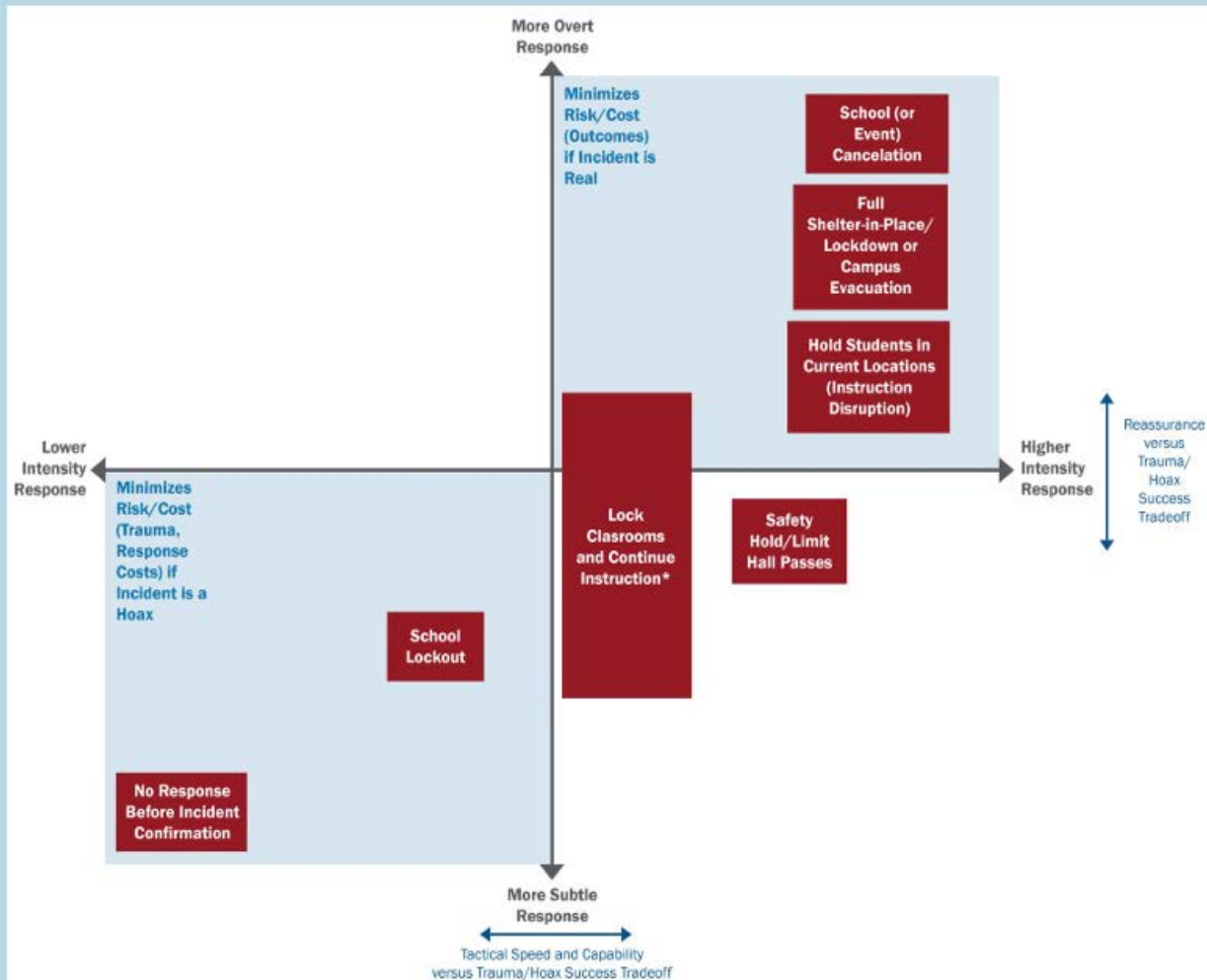


# Restricting Movement



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Figure 5.3 **Campus Movement Restriction and Closure Options for Threatened Schools**



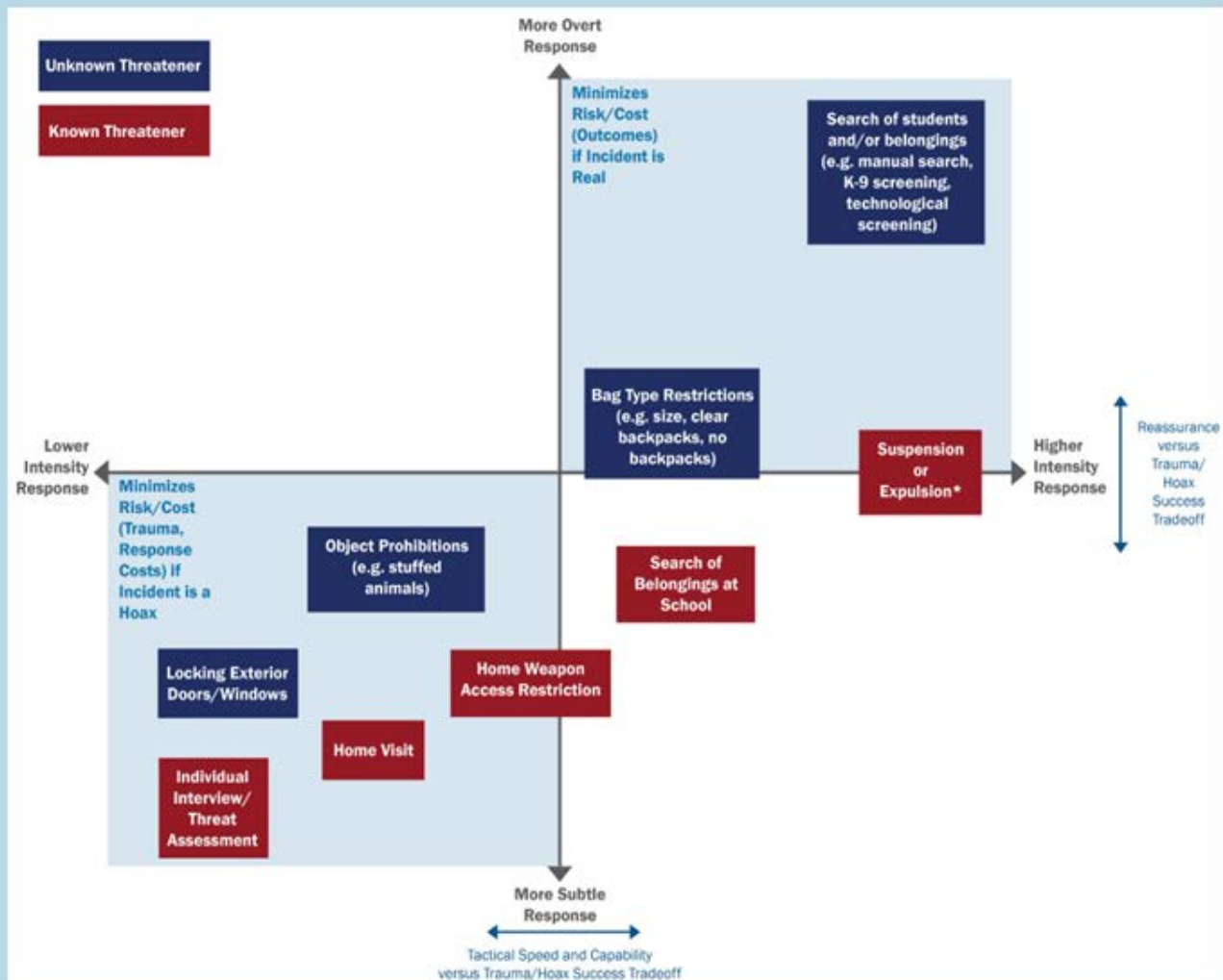


# Preventing Weapons on Campus



Page 27

Figure 5.4 **Options for Preventing Weapons on Campus in Threatened Schools**





# Ongoing Threat Evaluation



Page 28

- School personnel should engage law enforcement partners.
- Having multiple parties representing diverse disciplines involved in the threat triage process will lead to a more robust, actionable and defensible evaluation of the situation.
- Ongoing threat assessment efforts seek out new information and data that either could increase or decrease the perceived credibility and level of concern about a threat.



# Communication



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Communication with the school community will remain critical until the threat situation is resolved, and in the aftermath of threat situations.





## Activity: Example Threat Scenario

Discuss what your district/school would do next...

*A high school added additional police resources in and around campus after reports of an anonymous social media threat of violence against the school. Local police worked with the school to identify the origin of the threat, eventually determining that the threat was not credible and was likely not attributable to a student at the school.*







## Debrief

### District's Response:

Throughout the threat situation, both the school district and local police department issued timely communications to the broader community, specifying that all threats are taken seriously and that making a threat against a school, even as a joke, is a serious crime with consequences. Having determined that the threat was not credible, local police issued the following statement to the community: "We would like to thank the students who saw the post and notified school staff, who then reported it to us. We would encourage all students, parents, and community members to report any threatening messages or suspicious activity they may come across so that our officers can investigate and take appropriate action."



an incident or emergency



# After a Threat Emergency



Reference  
Guide p. 2

Flowchart Figure 1: **What To Do Before and After a Threat Emergency**

## What To Do Before a Threat

Build and maintain relationships with local first responders through regular communications and training.

- Conduct outreach to include police, fire and EMS.

Develop an emergency operations plan (EOP) that includes an annex specifically for anonymized threat situations.

- Train applicable school staff on how to use the EOP annex.
- Share and validate the EOP with police and other first responders.
- Update the plan annually.

## What To Do After a Threat

Provide access to resources to address trauma and stress.

- Offer counseling and other mental health services.
- Facilitate opportunities for community feedback.

Plan an after-action review of the emergency.

- Incorporate entities from inside the school community and other partners involved in threat response.



**Key Idea 6:**  
Enhance school preparedness to address  
future threats.





# Preparedness

- ❖ Establish a threat response protocol for addressing anonymized threats
- ❖ Provide training to students and staff and conduct required drills
- ❖ Inform families of basic threat response procedures and prepare to communicate with the school community when threats occur
- ❖ Prepare to provide support resources to address the impacts of threats and emergencies



# Establish a Protocol



Pages 31-32

- ❖ Key contacts at the school and in the broader community
- ❖ A list of steps to take when the school is notified of a threat
- ❖ Role assignments, specifying who will lead communication during the incident and have control over next steps
- ❖ Other key details, such as designated areas for evacuations



# Training & Drills



Pages 32-33

NYS requires that all drills be conducted in a trauma-informed manner.

- No props, fake scenarios, actors, etc.
- Integrating sequenced practice activities – such as developmentally appropriate discussion exercise – before initiating drills
- Always announce it is a drill (except evacuation), and always notify parents in advance (all drills)





# Inform Families



Page 33

- ❖ Communicate effectively and promptly with families during and after a threat incident.
- ❖ Local education agencies should prepare protocols for:
  - How and when communication with families will occur during a threat emergency
  - What information to disseminate
  - Who will disseminate it







# Provide Support Resources



Page 33

- Build relationships with local organizations:  
[School Based Mental Health Clinics](#)  
[OMH Field Offices](#)  
[NYSED Community Resource Map](#)
- Provide teachers with guidance on how to transition back to instruction after a threat incident
- Allow multiple opportunities for students to voice their needs and opinions





## Support Resources

Where/how have you identified community resources to support your school community?





# Conclusion



Page 34

Threats made to schools are an increasing problem, and significantly disrupt school operations and traumatize school communities.

Readiness efforts can help prepare school and public safety leaders to effectively balance the full range of risks faced by schools in an era of all-too-common school violence.





# Key Resources

## For Parents & Caregivers:

- [Raising Digitally Responsible Youth: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers](#)
- [Social Media Parents' Checklist](#)
- [Social Media Before, During, and After School Crisis: Tips for Parents and Educators](#)

## Addressing Threats & Swatting Incidents:

- [Identifying, Assessing and Managing Threats of Targeted Violence](#)
- [Response and Investigative Suggestions for School Threats](#)
- [Guidelines for Responding to Digital Threats](#)
- [Strategies to Address Swatting Incidents](#)
- [Social Media Threat Guidance \(Infographic\)](#)
- [Bomb Threat Checklist](#)



# Key Resources, continued

## Emergency Operations Planning:

- [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#)
- [The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#)
- [REMS TA Center's EOP Interactive Tools](#)
- [Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence](#)
- [United States Secret Service K-12 Bystander Reporting Toolkit](#)
- [NASSP Principal Recovery Network Guide to Recovery](#)

## NYS-Specific Resources:

- [NYS CFSS School Safety Plan Resources](#)
- [NYSED School Safety Plan Resources](#)
- [Standard Response Protocol and Standard Reunification Method](#)



# Questions?





# Contact Us



## New York State Center for School Safety

844-897-9567

[www.NYSCFSS.org](http://www.NYSCFSS.org)

[nyscenterforschoolsafety@measinc.com](mailto:nyscenterforschoolsafety@measinc.com)



## New York State Education Department

Office of Student Support Services

[safetyplans@nysed.gov](mailto:safetyplans@nysed.gov)

518-486-6090

<https://www.p12.nysed.gov/ss/>



# Survey



<https://measurement.welcomesyourfeedback.com/cfss0123>