

School Threat Assessment Teams: Meeting the New Requirement

June 29, 2023

On August 1, 2022, Governor Murphy signed legislation requiring New Jersey Public Schools, Charter Schools, and Renaissance Schools, commencing at the start of the 2023-24 school year, to develop and adopt policies for the establishment of threat assessment teams in their schools.

According to the new law, "the purpose of a threat assessment team shall be to provide school teachers, administrators, and other staff with assistance in identifying students of concern, assessing those students' risk for engaging in violence or other harmful activities, and delivering intervention strategies to manage the risk of harm for students who pose a potential safety risk, to prevent targeted violence in the school, and ensure a safe and secure school environment that enhances the learning experience for all members of the school community."

Threat Assessment Teams shall be multidisciplinary in membership and include:

- a school psychologist;
- school counselor;
- school social worker or other school employees with expertise in student counseling;
- a teaching staff member;
- a school principal or other senior school administrator;
- a safe schools resource officer or school employee who serves as a school liaison to law enforcement; and
- the designated school safety specialist.

Additional school employees may serve as team members or may be consulted during the threat assessment process.

Policies should be consistent with guidance developed by the Department of Education in consultation with State law enforcement agencies and the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness.

The new law also requires that "[w]hen assessing a student whose behavior may pose a threat to the safety of the school community, in the case of a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan, the threat assessment team shall consult with the IEP team or 504 team to determine whether the aberrant behavior is a threat to school safety and is being properly addressed in a manner that is required by N.J.A.C. 6A:14 and all federal and State special education laws."

The law requires that teams participate in training to ensure that the threat assessment team is able to assess student behavior accurately and to ensure that threat assessment teams do not have a disparate impact on students based on their race, ethnicity, homelessness status, religious belief, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

The training shall, at a minimum, include training on adverse childhood experiences, childhood trauma, cultural competency, and implicit bias.

The Porzio Education Team is available to assist in all aspects of the implementation of this new requirement policy development, team selection, coordination, training, and guidance during the threat assessment process.

In addition to our extensive experience in Education Law, the Porzio Education Team includes a former NJ Police Chief and NJDOE School Safety Specialist; Superintendent; Executive County Superintendent; NJDOE Commissioner; NJDOE Assistant Commissioner; and Special Agent in Charge, United States Secret Service. These specialists are available to assist our clients in navigating this new requirement and provide guidance during the threat assessment process to support this effort to prevent school violence.