A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM FOR THREAT ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS

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READING:

Assessing Student Threats: Implementing the Salem-Keizer System (2nd Edition)

VanDreal, McCarthy, Swinehart, Speckmaier, Elliott, Okada, Rainwater, Novotney, Rutledge, Mendoza, Byrd

Rowman and Littlefield
(800) 462-6420.
email orders@rowman.com
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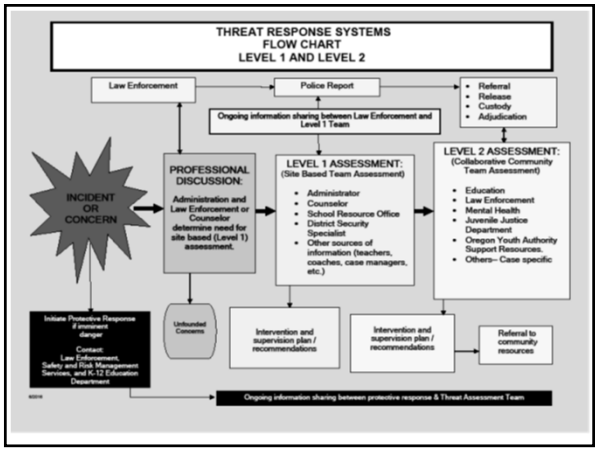
The presentation will:

- Review the research and basic principles regarding related to student threat assessment, sexual misconduct, fire behavior, and suicide.
- Review the steps, developmental procedures, and protocols necessary to develop a two-tiered, multi-disciplinary, multi-agency threat response system.
- Explore changes to the system that may be necessary to adapt to the existing resources of your community.
- Provide and overview of assessment protocols for K-12 campus threat response systems.
- Provide Lab exercises and case reviews as examples.

The presentation will not…

provide all of the training necessary to establish a level of expertise in leading Community Level threat assessment investigations or in leading community threat assessment teams.

Advanced training in threat assessment and threat management is available through job shadowing Mid-Valley STAT team members, through the resources noted in the book, or by searching the web for threat assessment training.



STAT

Student Threat Assessment Team

- The chances of being harmed by violence in a school are 1 in 2 million… killed by homicide in a school, about 1 in 2 to 4 million, depending on the year.
- The chances of being hit by lightning in a particular year are 1 in 960 thousand. Annually, there is a 1 in 31,000 chance of being poisoned by cafeteria food.
- A youth is approximately 40 times more likely to be killed by homicide outside of school than inside a school.
- School safety has improved steadily within the last 20 years.
- Still, depending upon how the data is measured, over the past 15 years in America, the rate of targeted or rampage killings has increased when places of commerce and higher education are factored in.

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- **Response in education and community policy has varied from highly reactive policy making to avoidance and denial.**
- **Furthermore, students and community members frequently make threats or use threatening talk as a means of socializing and communicating. How do we know when a threat is real, when do we worry and how do we respond?**

The Threat Assessment System objectives are:

1. Assess threats of potentially harmful or lethal behavior and determine the level of concern and action required.
2. Organize resources and strategies to manage situations involving people that pose threats to others.
3. Maintain a sense of psychological safety within the community.

JUSTIFICATIONS

1. **Concerns regarding violence and school safety.**
2. **Response to (ORS 339.250) requiring policy and procedure.**
3. **Zero-Tolerance Policy, expulsion. Reactive public policy measures.**
4. **Psychological Safety.**

Advantages of a Threat Assessment System

- Shared ownership, shared responsibility. Decreased liability.
- Multi-discipline, multi-agency.
- Expeditious but methodical.
- Community collaboration and ownership.
- Identification of risk in clear terms.
- Interventions and supervision strategies that fit the situation and accurately address risk.
- Promotes observation and supervision.
- Increases both the physical safety of a community and the psychological sense of safety.

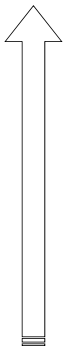
BASIC PRINCIPLES AND SUPPORTIVE RESEARCH

DEFINITION OF A THREAT

**The intention
to commit harm to a target
or be a menace or source of danger
to a target**

AGGRESSION CONTINUUM
(from Eric M. Johnson, PhD.)

Bombing
Shooting
Raping
Stabbing
Beating
Strangling
(Violent Aggression: serious or lethal injury)
Sexual coercion
Fighting
Hitting with objects
Throwing objects
Slugging
Kicking
Scratching
Biting
Slapping
Pushing
(Aggression Behavior: low to moderate injury)



Types of Aggression

- Reactive/Affective/Impulsive
- Targeted/Premeditated/Predatory

Reactive Aggression

- **Absence of planning**
- **Elevated emotional state**
- **Aggressor feels under immediate threat**

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Reactive/Affective Aggression

- Absence of planning
- Usually associated with an elevated emotional state
- Perpetrator of aggression believes they are under immediate threat

TARGETED AGGRESSION

Targeted Violence

(Fein&Vossekuil, 1998)

- **Targeted violence is not reactive.**
- **It is not the result of someone going mental or "snapping."**
- **It is the result of an understandable and often discernible process of thinking and behaving.**
- **The aggressor will display "attack-related" behaviors that move along a continuum of idea to action, including justification, planning, rehearsing, and logistical preparations.**

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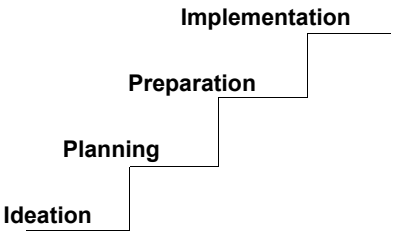
Targeted Violence Pathway



What is threat assessment?

As defined by the Secret Service (*Threat Assessment in Schools* pg. 29): "The primary purpose of a threat assessment is to prevent targeted violence. The threat assessment process is centered upon analysis of the facts and evidence of behavior in a given situation. The appraisal of risk in a threat assessment focuses on actions, communications, and specific circumstances that might suggest that an individual intends to mount an attack and is engaged in planning or preparing for that event."

Context and Situation

The assessment of the “unique” interaction and dynamics between the perpetrator, the target and the situation they share. The question is “does the person ‘pose’ a threat,” not “did the person ‘make’ a threat.”

Attack Related Behavior

Behavior that supports the threat as a More serious consideration…

Examples:

•PLANNNING
•PREPARATION
•WEAPONS ACQUISITION
•REHEARSAL
•SCHEDULING

Threats and Communication

Inappropriate Communication: Any unwarranted contact or approach that is strange, threatening or ominously predictive and intended to unsettle or unnerve.

- Direct
- Indirect
- Veiled
- Conditional
- Expressive

Inhibitors (Adult)

- Employment
- Finances
- Health
- Residence
- Children
- Family
- Looking to the future
- Resolving the grievance

What are examples of inhibitors in the youth population?

JACA – Gavin DeBecker

- Justification
- Alternatives
- Consequences
- Ability

Research – Key Points

- Shootings were rarely impulsive.
- No consistent profile of school shooter.
- Shooters had difficulty coping with loss and failure.
- Shooters perceived or experienced severe longstanding rejection and bullying by peers.
- Most shooters had ready access to guns. Some made considerable efforts to acquire guns.
- Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to attack.
- All shooters were of concern to parents, teachers and / or peers. Peers knew of the plan ahead of time (some collaborated).
- Cultural scripts are readily available as examples of solving problems.
- Failure of surveillance systems.

Research Summary

- What kind of communication has the student made regarding their intention to harm others? Is the communication a statement of anger such as “I’m going to kill you…” or does it involve details of planning or an ongoing consideration of an attack?
- Is there a motive? Does the student experience or perceive severe rejection of bullying from other students?
- Are there indications of behavior that increase the possibility of violence occurring (plan, acquiring weapons, rehearsal or simulation, other preparations, scheduling)?
- Is there a specific target?

Research Summary

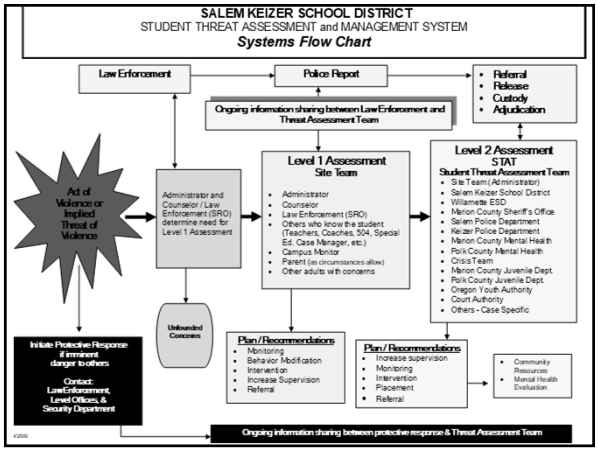
- Is there peer collaboration? Are peers aware of or concerned about a potential attack?
- Does the situation involve student/students who are out of alternatives, marginalized and disenfranchised, low on psychological reserves, out of acceptable coping strategies, and willing to accept the consequences of carrying out the threat?
- Are there personality or behavioral traits, family dynamics, School system issues or social dynamics that lead to a more vulnerable and potentially escalating situation?

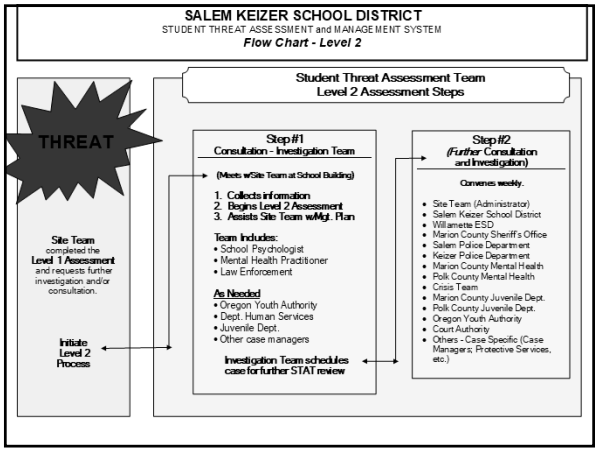
Management Strategies

- Protection of target
- Increase accountability for student of concern
- Increase supervision
- Monitor for weapons
- Monitor communication
  - Verbal, academic-related, social media
- Build relationships
- Increase inhibitors
- Decrease agitators
- Community resources
  - Mental health, Juvenile Dept, faith community, mentoring, etc.

Lab Six Situations

- **Three boys, engaging in BB gun wars after school, violent first person shooter games, knife collecting, and aggressive.**
- **One boy, has a large knife in his backpack (claims he used it hunting with his father the previous weekend and forgot is was there).**
- **One boy, brings a knife to school as a defensive means of protecting himself against bullies who are tormenting him and extorting his money.**
- **One Boy… an aggressive bully. Brings knife to school to intimidate others.**
- **One boy, speaks of shooting others at school as revenge for being ignored and Rejected, and to show that he is not weak or afraid.**
- **Two boys, both identified as Emotionally Disturbed and attending school in a self-contained classroom. One is very aggressive, engaging in combative talk, threatening teachers and students if he doesn't get his way, is extremely irritable and has a very short fuse. The other is a follower but if pushed, can become extremely explosive and aggressive. They are in constant conflict and very close to fighting.**





UNIQUE FEATURES OF YOUR SYSTEM

- FTE
- RESOURCES
- TIME
- DISTANCE
- TRAINING
- FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS
- AVAILABILITY
- AGENCY COMMITMENT
- OTHER

Level 1 Site Based Protocol development

Develop a template, with identified key risk factors as well as supervision strategies, that all members of the team use as a guide during assessment. Document the use of the template in every case. Document the risk concerns and document the supervision and safety planning.

K-12 LEV 1 SPECIFICS

MUST HAVE:

- Plan to Protect Victim
- Notification of Threat Log
- Notification of Threat Letter

WHAT WORKS IN YOUR SCHOOLS?

- Level 1 Assessment (options)
- Student Interview, Witness Interview
- Parent Interview
- Teacher Questionnaire

Level 2 Team Design Options

1. Use Level 2 system with Investigative Team and Level 2 Investigation Protocol.
2. Level 2 is Community Team only. Develop a form documenting the demographics of each case, the inquiry and responses regarding risk factors of that case and the supervision strategies recommended.

Suicide Risk Assessment

Suicide - Statistics

- Approximately 17% of 8th graders and 11th graders in Oregon reported seriously considering suicide in the past 12 months (2013).
- Nearly 10th of 8th graders and 8% of 11th graders reported having attempted suicide one or more times in the previous 12 months (2013).
- Female students were more likely to report seriously considering suicide and having attempted suicide than male students.

Table 3: The characteristics of youth suicides among youth aged 10–24 years, Oregon, 2014

	Deaths	% of total
Age		
10–14	7	8%
15–19	32	36%
20–24	51	57%
Sex		
Male	69	77%
Female	21	23%
Race/ethnicity		
White	77	86%
African American	0	0%
Am. Indian/Native Alaskan	1	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	3%
Multirace	1	1%
Other/unknown	6	7%
Hispanic	9	10%
Student status		
Middle school	5	6%
High school	21	23%
Mechanism of death		
Firearm	48	53%
Hanging/suffocation	30	33%
Poisoning	6	7%
Other	6	7%
Other		
Veteran	4	4%

Source: Oregon Violent Death Reporting System

Suicide Myths

Credit: Suicide Prevention Lab

#1: Asking someone directly about suicide will cause them to become suicidal.

#2: Depression causes all suicides.

#3: We cannot really prevent suicides.

#4: Suicides always happen in an impulsive moment.

#5: Young children (age 5-12) cannot be suicidal.

#6: When there has been a suicide, having a school assembly is a good idea.

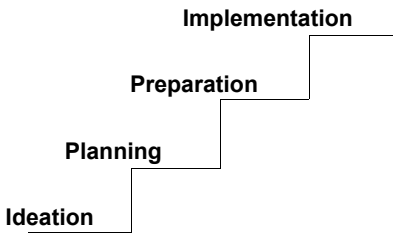
Suicide – Common circumstances

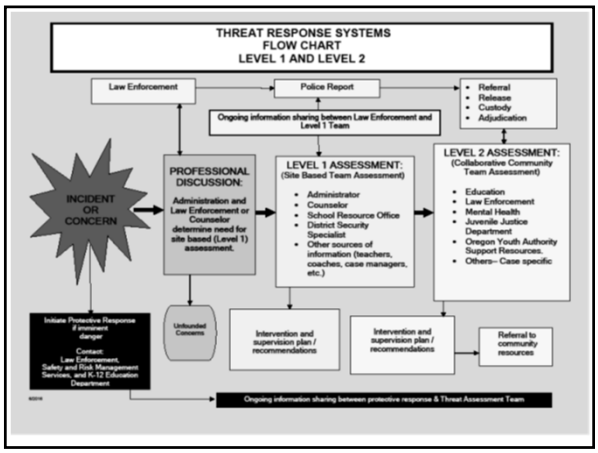
Table 2. Common circumstances surrounding suicide incidents by sex, among youth ages 10–24 years, Oregon, 2003–2012

Circumstance	Males (N=532)		Females (N=119)		All (N=651)	
Mental health status	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Mentioned mental health problems*	348	65	88	74	436	67
Diagnosed mental disorder	171	32	66	55	237	36
Problem with alcohol	83	16	14	12	97	15
Problem with other substance	83	16	24	20	107	16
Current depressed mood	210	39	54	45	264	41
Current treatment for mental health problem†	127	24	55	46	182	28
Interpersonal relationship problems	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Broken up with boy/girlfriend, intimate partner problem	185	35	47	39	232	36
Suicide of family member or friend within past five years	14	3	3	3	17	3
Family stressor(s)‡	66	32	27	49	93	36
History of abuse as a child§	2	1	8	15	10	4
Life stressors	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
A crisis in the past two weeks	207	39	45	38	252	39
Recent criminal legal problem	79	15	3	3	82	13
School problem	44	8	11	9	55	8
Suicidal behaviors	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Disclosed intent to die by suicide	199	37	44	37	243	37
Left a suicide note	157	30	46	39	203	31
History of suicide attempt	95	18	48	40	143	22

Source: Oregon Violent Death Reporting System

Targeted Violence Pathway





SIRC

Sexual Incident Response Committee

Purpose of the Sexual Incident Response Committee (SIRC)

- Enable schools to:
  - identify students with sexual misconduct issues
  - develop comprehensive supervision plans
  - access consultation and community resources when necessary
  - manage liability around educating a potentially dangerous population
- Mobilize resources/services for sexual misconduct
- Considers *and therefore* improves school *and* community safety
- Help to manage the flow of information from Juvenile Justice and District Attorney:
  - OYA
  - County Probation
  - District Attorney Notifications (pending charges or adjudication of students)
  - Juvenile Psychiatric Review Board
  - Liberty House
  - SBU 12 Committee
  - Local agencies providing sex offender treatment (e.g. PTCN)

Sexual Harming Behavior

- Sexually reactive students (trauma related)
- Early exposure to pornography
  - Immature banter graphic in nature
  - Confusion/curiosity
- Developmental issues that manifest in boundary issues
  - Difficulty reading social cues
  - Limited social skills and seeking peer response
  - Immature banter
- Disability related issues that manifest in sexual behavior
  - Soliciting staff/student reaction
  - Seeking to get staff to back-off (i.e. groping staff)
  - Sensory needs
- Sexual Misconduct/Harassment
- Sexual Misconduct/Sexual Assault

High Risk Factors –

Sexually Abused – youth *sexually* abused 5 or more times were 5x more likely to re-offend than a youth who was never abused

Physically Abused – youth physically abused 5 or more times were 6x more likely to re-offend than a youth who was never abused

Location of Offense - youth charged with a felony sex offense committed in a public place was nearly 3x more likely to re-offend

Number of Victims - those with three or more victims were nearly 5x more likely to re-offend than those with one victim

School Discipline - youth with three or more different discipline problems in school were 3x more likely to re-offend than a youth with one discipline problem

Special Education - youth with a special education placement (IEP) were over 3½x more likely to re-offend than a youth without an IEP

Sexual Behavior Continuum

Consider Age and Force as factors

- Flirting/Sexual Harassment
- Public kissing/hugging
- Peeping
- Sexual talk/drawing/gesturing
- Frotteurism toward an object
- Public masturbation
- Exposing sexual parts
- Over the clothes sexual touching
- Frotteurism toward a person
- Under the clothes non-penetrative genital touching
- Penetrative genital touching (oral, anal, vaginal)
- Penetrative sex (oral, anal, vaginal)

SIRC Screening

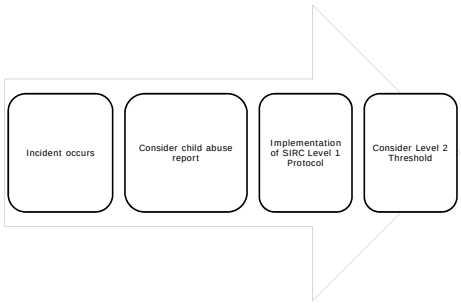
- Peer to Peer
  - < 3 years difference in age and/or development
- Isolated
  - No history

- Incident Details
  - Consistent report among students
  - Not coercive
  - Developmentally normative sexual behavior
  - Not painful
  - No confusion
  - No power imbalance
  - No weapon present
  - No grooming
  - Not creepy
  - No discomfort

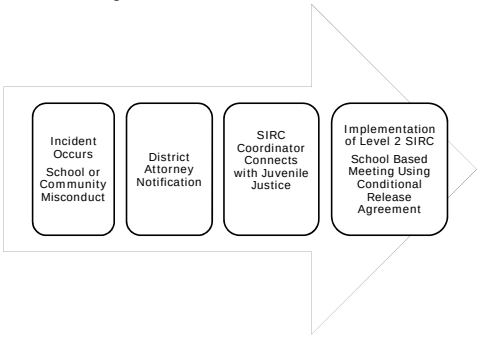
Safety Planning: Situational Concerns

- Access
  - Be mindful of the target of interest specifically vulnerable peers (cognitive, developmental, physical or social hierarchy)
- Opportunity/Method
  - More likely to offend in times of emotional distress
- Other considerations:
  - Most kids don't like supervision
  - Supervision stays in place until intent is impacted
  - Important to maintain documentation
  - Good supervision protects staff, school, **and** the student of concern

Non-adjudicated Students



Pre-Adjudicated Youth



Level 2 SIRC Threshold

- Any active criminal investigation of sexual misconduct (in the school ***or*** the community)
- A student has been arrested, lodged in detention or is being processed through juvenile court for sexual misconduct.
- A younger student (typically under 12) or a student with a significant developmental or cognitive impairment is under the jurisdiction of the court or child welfare based on an egregious sexual act against another child or an extensive pattern of sexual misconduct.

Level 2 SIRC Threshold

- Level 1 SIRC is in place and yet despite consistent implementation of the plan, the student escalates in sexual acting out or you are unable to successfully mitigate the behavior despite ***extensive*** effort and ***strategic*** intervention.
  - ** *Call immediately* if the victim is a student in the same building or if the crime allegedly occurred in the education setting ***or*** during a school related activity or event
  - ** *Call* to consult with SIRC coordinator if you have a parent who continues to be escalated about their child being subjected to another student's sexual misconduct.

Benefits Of This Approach

- Encourages information flow
- Model is less time intensive
- Liability is shared
- Expertise is applied when needed
- Reduces panic or overresponse
- Considers community as well as school

Fire Behavior Response

Fire Behavior Response

- Between 2007-2011, nationally 49,300 structure fires caused by children resulted in 80 deaths and $235 million in damages.
- 45% of all arson arrests in the US were juveniles.
- Characteristics of reported fires set by youth in Oregon:
  - Set by males ages 12-14
  - Occur between 4-8 pm
  - Occur June through September
- Most youth are curious about fire.
- Youth often escalate in fires until they get caught.
- Youth need accountability, understanding of consequences, and intervention: education and/or mental health.

Fire Behavior Response

- Red flags
  - False sense of control over the fire
  - Poor understanding of fire
  - Access to matches and lighters
  - Lack of appropriate supervision

⇨ Needs supervision, lack of access, and fire safety educational intervention.

Fire Behavior Response

- BIG Red flags
  - Going out of their way to collect firesetting materials or having a stash of materials
  - Staying to watch the fire
  - Not calling for help or becoming the hero
  - Strong attraction to fire
  - History of setting fires
  - Use of accelerants
  - Using fire as a weapon
  - Burning objects that are significant to others
  - Directed at others for revenge or to show power
  - Displayed lack of feeling or excitement
  - Impulsivity

⇨ Interventions may include supervision, lack of access, fire safety educational intervention, and possibly mental health treatment.

Fire Behavior Response

- Fire damage and evidence at school should not be cleaned or moved prior to investigation by deputy fire marshal
- Fire agencies
  - Investigate
  - Conduct screenings
  - Deliver fire safety education interventions

BUILDING A COLLABORATION AND CHOOSING MEMBERS

Organizing a system

- Need, justification and authorization.
- Community ownership, commitment, and responsibility.
- Policy and procedures necessary for functioning. (Legal counsel)
- Organize resources, design system and refine.
- Training, implementation, more training.
- Maintenance of program, trouble-shooting and ongoing training.

Choosing Team Members
(Modified from US Dept of Ed. and USSS)

- An ability to relate well to others.
- An awareness and sensitivity to the difference between harming and helping in an intervention.
- A reputation for fairness and trustworthiness.
- A questioning, analytical and even skeptical mindset.
- Training in the collection and evaluation of information from multiple sources.
- Discretion and an appreciation for the importance of keeping information confidential.
- Familiarity with the contemporary issues of school and community safety.
- The ability to serve as a formal link or liaison between various systems (a “boundary spanner”, a “team player” who believes in the project and the process.)
- In-depth knowledge about their own organization, resource availability, and both political and ethical boundaries.
- Full credibility and respect within their own organization.

94% of administrators stated that:

- STAT effectively identified potentially dangerous students and situations.
- STAT had positive effects on school safety.
- STAT provided important information necessary for support, discipline, and placement decisions.
- STAT fulfills a valuable role in schools.

In the same survey, 90% of administrators reported that STAT increased efficient coordination with law enforcement and mental health.

LABS AND CASE STUDIES

QUESTIONS?