MCPS Violence Prevention and Threat Assessment

Missoula County Public Schools follows national evidence-based strategies geared toward violence prevention in our schools. MCPS relies heavily of the importance of a school climate that promotes the development of positive teacher-student relationships and focuses on providing help for students before problems escalate into violence. Our district seeks annual input on the climate in our schools, with particular emphasis on students' trust in adults and willingness to seek help for problems and concerns. Administrators at each school work to improve the school's services and structures each year based on this data.

Another important component of our comprehensive school safety plan is our Threat Assessment Procedures. Our Threat Assessment Procedures give MCPS schools an alternative to zero tolerance discipline policies that have proven to be ineffective and counterproductive. These procedures are proven to prevent threats from being carried out and identify interventions to prevent future acts of violence. Threat Assessment has been recommended by the US Secret Service and the Department of Education in their studies of school violence.

Threat Assessment Procedures

The threat assessment is based on the combined efforts of a school-based team including representatives from administration, mental health professionals employed by our schools, and law enforcement. In unusually complex cases, the team might draw upon professionals in the local community. The interdisciplinary team approach improves the efficiency and scope of the assessment process and reduces the risk of observer bias.

In situations where a potential threat is reported, school teams**:**
- identify student threats to commit a violent act,
- determine the seriousness of the threat,
- determine the likelihood the threat will be carried out and
- develop intervention plans that protect potential victims and address the underlying problem or conflict that stimulated the threatening behavior
- create a communication plan based on the specific circumstances of the threat

MCPS has established district-wide policies and procedures which require that all threats of violence must be taken seriously and investigated.

Types of Threats

A threat is an expression of intent to do harm or act out violently against someone or something. It may be spoken, written, or symbolic. Threats can be expressed directly or indirectly to the

victim or to others, and threats may be explicit or implied. Threats sometimes, but rarely, actually involve guns or explosive devices. Many students who make a threat will never carry it out. Conversely, others who pose a real danger may not make an explicit threat. Threats may be communicated to the intended victim or related to a third party. A threat to harm others can be transient (i.e., expression of anger or frustration that can be quickly or easily resolved) or substantive (i.e., serious intent to harm others that involves a detailed plan and means). We encourage students and teachers to report both transient and substantive threats.

Threat Management Plan

If one of our schools determines that an individual poses a threat of violence, a plan is developed that involves individual management, monitoring, and support. Three functions of threat management are:
- controlling and/ or containing the situation to prevent a possible attack,
- protecting potential targets of the threat, and
- providing support and guidance to aid the student who is at risk for violence in dealing with his or her problems in an appropriate and adaptive manner.

Options for Intervention

Some interventions might need to be staged immediately (e.g., bringing the student in question under adult supervision) while others require long-term planning and monitoring (e.g., conflict resolution efforts). Our teams consider whether the student can stay in school, what alternatives may be needed, how and when to notify families, if and when to involve law enforcement, and what mental health, social service, and school- based interventions are required to reduce the student's risk for violence. In cases where a criminal offense has been committed, law enforcement may choose to conduct a criminal investigation and pursue legal action against the presumed offender or offenders. We share information only about threats which are considered actionable, credible and real. This ensures that our community does not experience undue stress or become complacent when too many incidents are reported that are low level concern.

Reporting Threats

A key component to keeping students safe is ensuring students, teachers and community members report concerns or threats to school administrators or law enforcement. The Secret Service report 81% of the time at least one person had prior knowledge of planned attack and 59% of the time more than one person had knowledge. Alarmingly, only 4% with prior knowledge tried to dissuade the attacker and many with prior knowledge did not believe it could happen. All members of the community, especially students, must understand the distinction

between seeking help to prevent violence and "snitching," or informing on someone for personal gain.

Additional Benefits of Threat Assessment
There are a number of other positive outcomes related to the use of a threat assessment approach. These include fewer instances of bullying, perceptions of a more positive and supportive school climate, greater willingness to seek help, and fewer long-term suspensions.

Resources:
- [National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Threat Assessment for School Administrators & Crisis Teams](#)
- [THREAT ASSESSMENT IN SCHOOLS: A GUIDE TO MANAGING THREATENING SITUATIONS AND TO CREATING SAFE SCHOOL CLIMATES](#)

MCPS School Discipline

MCPS Board Policy 3310 clearly states "the Board grants authority to a teacher or principal to hold a student to strict accountability for disorderly conduct in school, on the way to or from school, or during intermission or recess. Disciplinary action may be taken against any student guilty of gross disobedience or misconduct."

Discipline is a reaction to instances of student misconduct and must be appropriate based on the specific instance of student misconduct. Discipline is a part of every response to student misconduct, it is not a stand alone prevention strategy.
Disciplinary measures include, but are not limited to:
- Expulsion
- Suspension
- Detention, including Saturdays
- Clean-up duty
- Loss of student privileges
- Loss of bus privileges
- Notification to juvenile authorities and/or police
- Restitution for damages to school property

The Board grants authority to any teacher and to any other school personnel to impose on students under their charge any disciplinary measure, other than suspension or expulsion, corporal punishment or in-school suspension, that is appropriate and in accordance with policies and rules on student discipline. The Board authorizes teachers to remove students from classrooms for disruptive behavior.

MCPS Comprehensive School Climate and Violence Prevention Strategies

We want to make sure that students, families, and the community understand the steps we take together in our district to support our goal to prevent episodes of mass violence in one of our schools.

- continue to work to improve the safety and security of our facilities;
- train our staff through Active Resistance;
- conduct the 8 mandated safety drills in our school every year - these include fire, earthquake and evacuation drills;
- tend to the social, emotional and behavioral needs of our students;
- use our threat assessment procedures to evaluate all threats reported;
- diligently follow the next steps with our law enforcement and mental health partners based on the results of threat assessments;
- maintain our close partnerships with community mental health professionals who support students with high needs;
- implement our signs of suicide screener in middle school to identify students experiencing mental health issues;
- monitor student email, and all services associated with Google G-Suite accounts for instances of bullying, threats or other disturbing content;
- monitor student and staff access to the Internet and unusual or concerning activity;
- support tolerance and respect for diversity in our schools.

Although our staff and students may not be able to train for each and every scenario, we can train to know parameters within which we might respond. We can train to think and react if various situations present themselves. *We can also encourage our students to understand that if they see something they must say something.*

Together, we can become more astute observers and we can become increasingly proactive in our thinking about the safety of students, staff and our community.

We encourage all of you to reach out to students, neighbors and members of the community who may need support or affirmation. We believe that we have the collective capacity to be the difference in Missoula.