



# RETHINKING SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT:

## A Proactive Path to Student Well-Being

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**T**oday's students face a complex and demanding world that shifts faster than the latest social media trend. Along with academic challenges in the classroom, students must navigate peer pressure, family issues and the constant presence of an always-online society. Although the struggles may not always be obvious, they can manifest in

students as subtle behavioral changes that, if ignored, could develop into more serious problems.

For educators and school safety professionals, ensuring student safety now involves not only maintaining physical security, but also supporting mental and emotional well-being. The result could be a positive shift in the way we support

young people, but it calls for a reassessment of how schools identify and respond to signs of distress.

### From Reactive to Preventive Threat Assessment

Traditionally, school threat assessment has been viewed through a narrow lens, focusing on immediate danger and being driven by crisis—all with a reactive response. What if, instead of reacting to incidents, school safety teams were equipped with the tools and processes to identify early warning signs and intervene before a student reaches a crisis point?

Behavioral threat assessment and management (BTAM) practices provide a proactive, research-based framework that is used in many school districts. BTAM provides structured guidance to recognize concerning behaviors, assess risk and develop support plans centered on student well-being rather than punishment.

While BTAM provides a best-practice foundation, its implementation often falls short due to outdated tools and siloed information. Student case details, such as attendance issues, behavioral reports and







counselor meeting notes, are scattered across departments or stored in file cabinets. Teams may rely on handwritten notes, email threads or informal conversations, making it difficult to identify critical warning signs.

To close these gaps, school districts are turning to digital case management systems that centralize student support workflows and streamline processes. The platforms bring together multiple data sources and stakeholders—including teachers, counselors, school resource officers and mental health professionals—in a shared, secure environment.

Rather than piecing together a student's history across fragmented systems, staff can use digital case management to view a comprehensive, real-time picture of each case. They can flag early behavioral concerns, identify patterns and develop individualized plans with input from team members. The systems also ensure that information is stored in compliance with regulations, such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, preserving student privacy while enabling appropriate collaboration.

## Collaboration & Support

In Wood County, OH, officials have developed a countywide behavioral intervention program to connect educators, public health agencies, mental health professionals and law enforcement officers across 10 school districts and a re-

gional career center. Supported by leadership from the county's Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board, the program is creating a shared framework for identifying and addressing concerning behaviors to help teams intervene early in support of student well-being.







During the program's current pilot phase, a small group of schools is helping shape the required digital threat assessment tools and workflows. By digitizing the process, the schools are streamlining case documentation and monitoring while promoting human-centered intervention. A unified dashboard is improving early identification, coordination and care and laying the groundwork for further county-wide implementation.

Enhancing case management processes reflects a school community's broader dedication to student wellness. When educators have timely and accurate insights into student behavior, along with a shared system

for coordinating care, they can act with compassion and clarity. This kind of environment builds trust, not just between students and their teachers and counselors, but also within the multidisciplinary teams responsible for maintaining school safety.

Centralizing information at the county or statewide level can ensure continuity of care for students, especially when they transfer between schools or districts. Instead of losing important context or restarting the support process, educators and mental health professionals can access a student's existing case history, wellness plans and progress updates.

## Policy & Funding

Recognizing the importance of early intervention, many states are expanding grant programs to support student wellness and school safety initiatives. The funds can help districts train staff in BTAM practices and adopt digital tools to enhance case management. For schools navigating budget constraints, the grants offer a vital opportunity to invest in long-term student support infrastructure.

New legislation is also driving change. Ohio House Bill 123 requires schools, such as those in Wood County, to establish formal threat assessment teams and adopt structured reporting protocols. The policy and others like it encourage districts to move toward more standardized approaches to identifying and addressing behavioral concerns.

Together, investments in threat assessment funding and policy represent a significant and meaningful shift in how institutions approach school safety, emphasizing early understanding and support over punitive measures and helping schools address issues before they escalate.

As the conversation around school safety continues to evolve, most stakeholders agree prevention is as essential as detection. While tools like campus security cameras and metal detectors serve critical purposes, they cannot replace the daily, intentional efforts required to identify and support students in need.

By rethinking traditional threat assessment methods and adopting digital systems that improve visibility and coordination, school leaders can foster a connected, compassionate culture where every student feels seen, supported and set up for success. The earlier we intervene, the greater our opportunity to guide each student toward lasting mental and emotional well-being.

