

Threat Assessment Law

In August 2022, Governor Murphy signed P.L. 2022, c. 83, which requires all public school districts to establish policies and procedures to identify and respond to potential threats in school.

The law requires that each district develop and implement policies concerning how to assess, intervene, and take action if a student's behavior may pose a threat to the safety of the school community. Additionally, districts must provide guidance and training for students and staff on how to identify students of concern, designate specific school officials this information should be reported to, and determine how this should be communicated to students and staff.

The law also requires the creation of a threat assessment team for each school in the district. The purpose of these teams is to provide school employees with assistance in achieving these goals and overall ensuring a safe and secure school environment. The team must include, at least, a school psychologist or other employee with expertise in student counseling; a teaching staff member; a school principal or other senior administrator; a school resource officer or other employee who serves as a liaison with law enforcement; and the designated school safety specialist (established by a 2017 law). Other employees may be added to the team as members or can be consulted by the team as needed. Team members receive enhanced training on issues related to school safety and student behavior and can be called upon to determine whether student behavior should be considered threatening.

This law took effect at the beginning of this school year. This means that school districts should have relevant policies and procedures and threat assessment teams already in place. Unfortunately, in some instances this has not occurred.

Given the importance of this issue, if the district has not fully complied with the law, NJEA recommends that the local association sends a letter informing the superintendent of the district's obligations under the law and that the association will continue to follow up. A sample letter is included with this advisory. School violence impacts the safety of the school community as a whole. Because it also has a direct impact on employee safety, it is mandatorily negotiable. The top issues that should be raised include:

- A request/demand for prompt promulgation of a district policy;
- A request/demand for prompt training for all employees, including enhanced training for the members of the threat assessment team;
- A request/demand for the policy to provide that members of the threat assessment team will come from each building in the district;
- A request/demand that the association have meaningful input as to which local association members are to be included in the team. The association should insist upon the inclusion of qualified and knowledgeable members who will be vocal advocates; and,
- A request/demand that immediate notice of each threat be given to the president of the local association and to an association-designated building representative at each building.