



Prevention of School Violence: Student Threat Assessment in the Calgary and Area RCSD

Project Highlights and Key Findings

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Acknowledgements

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Outline

Purpose of the Project

Components and *Brief* Highlights from Each

1. Literature Review
2. Crossmap of Current Practices
3. Sector Key Informant Interviews

Gaps, Opportunities & Recommendations

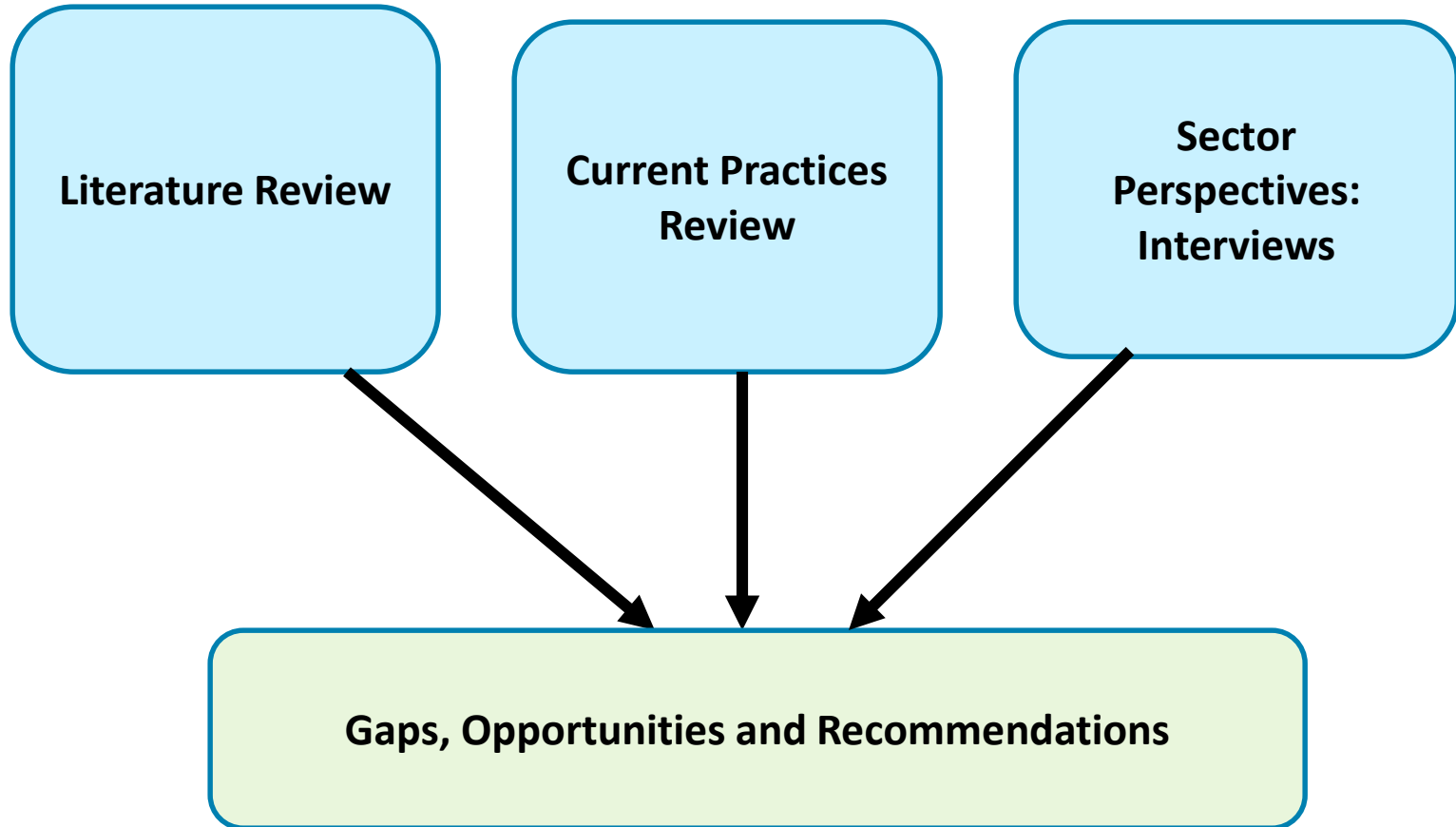


Purpose

To inform discussions about regional approaches to **student threat assessment (STA)**:

1. What is the **state of the science** in STA approaches?
2. Are there defined **best practices/essential components** in the area of STA in the context of school violence prevention?
3. **What are C&A RCSD partners doing** around STA, and how do the approaches compare with approaches from elsewhere?
4. What are C&A RCSD **sector views** on STA and options for further development?
5. What are some **gaps and opportunities** for advancing STA in the region?

Project Components



Literature Review





Literature Review Methods

Systematic Approach:

- Librarian consultation
- **Research papers:** education, psychology, health, social work, sociology
- **Policy/practice papers:** web and special databases
- Consensus selection & quality assessment
- Cited 143 papers (most 2010-2017)
- Full bibliography – 969 items and tabulated resources



Student Threat Assessment



prediction

Zero tolerance

SCHOOL CLIMATE

Target hardening

Leakage

SROs

Student Threat Assessment

Profiling

SECURITY

Risk assessment

Violence prevention

RAMPAGE

Safe and caring schools

Bullying

Peer Reporting

Disproportionate application



Lit Review Topics Covered

[Broader Violence Prevention and Bullying Literatures]

School-level Violence Prevention Approaches

- School Discipline Policies and Approaches
- Other Administrative Policies
- Physical Security
- School-Police Partnerships/School Resource Officers
- Peer Reporting

Threat Assessment

- History of Threat Assessment
- Student Threat Assessment: Definitions and Key Principles**
- Student Threat Assessment Models in Detail**
- Assessment Tools for Student Threat Assessment**
- Evidence for the Effectiveness of Student Threat Assessment**
- Student Threat Assessment in Canada
- Challenges and Innovations in School Violence Prevention related to STA



Key Findings

STA Approaches/Models *Described in the Scientific Literature*

Dallas Threat of Violence Risk Assessment (DVTRA)

- More of a risk check-list approach, no development after 2005

Networks Against School Shootings Program (NETWASS) [Germany]

- Aimed at a package of activities focused on teacher training and reporting
- STA part uses an adaptation of the VSTAG
- Has only published evaluation of teacher training so far

The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (VSTAG)



Key Findings

Evidence for Effectiveness of STA

- Supporting research found *only* for the VSTAG model incl.:
 - ✓ Fewer acts of aggression, fewer suspensions, discipline perceived to be fairer, more therapeutic interventions vs. punitive measures
 - ✓ Listed as an evidence-based practice in National Registry of Evidence-based Programs & Practices (SAMHSA)
 - ✓ Connected to whole school violence prevention approaches

Assessment Tools

- If need for a full/professional risk assessment:
- Review of evidence for 5 tools *for students in a school context*
- Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth (SAVRY) (Borum et al.)



Expert Recs on Violence Prevention

Example:

American Psychological Association (2017)

- Use STA approaches, implement violence prevention and positive behavioral interventions at three levels: universal, targeted and intensive assessment
- Foster positive school climates, enhance partnerships between schools, law enforcement, public health and community to coordinate and integrate efforts
- Program implementation through training and research, use of evidence-based and best practices in violence prevention programs

Current Practices





Current Practices

Calgary & Area RCSD Partner Approaches:



External Approaches

VSTAG

Leduc and Area RCSD (VTRA*)

Southwest Alberta RCSD (VTRA*)

Saskatoon & Area Community Protocol (VTRA*)

* Based on the work of Kevin Cameron and the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response (CCTATR)



Mapping Methods

Comparison Characteristics:

- 9 items on context and 31 items on the STA process itself
- From the literature with WG input
- Two rounds of extraction and checking
- WG weighed the items for importance

Caveat:

- Documents produced for *different purposes*
- (Training vs. protocol vs. policy/procedures vs. framework)
- But even so, enough info to map most characteristics for most



Example of Crossmap Findings

Contextual Items (2 of 9 items)

Overall Approach

- VTRA: more detail about structure, environment and applicable local legislation
- Variation across VTRA protocols in several aspects including terms, scope, assessment steps etc.

Connection to broader school VP

- This was more developed in VSTAG and CBE approaches
- VSTAG concepts and process are well researched; it is a school-district-based model with necessary connections to other players



Example of Crossmap Findings

STA Main Items (5 of 31 items)

Approach – VSTAG/VTRA steps operationalized in great detail

Structure and Oversight – 2 - 3 levels of STA teams; school/regional

Scope – wide variability in types of students and behaviors where articulated

Training – VSTAG and VTRA – varied in length, intensity and cost

Evidence-base/Review/Evaluation – VSTAG only model with published evidence of effectiveness and evaluation, VTRA recommends review and continued training but details vary across protocols



Sector Stakeholder Interviews





Sector Interviews Methods

Purpose: to understand the experiences of specific sector partner organizations with STA, their views on STA generally and on a possible regional approach

Sectors:

- ✓ policy level (Dept. ED) (2)
 - ✓ law enforcement (2)
 - ✓ child and family services
 - ✓ STA expert serving CCSD
-
- 8 open-ended questions; 30 – 45 minute interviews
 - Content analysis
 - Circulated back to respondents for validation



Sector Interviews Example Findings

- ***Policy Context:*** regulations supportive of information sharing but also broader safe and caring schools approaches and inclusion
- ***The Role of STA and Related VP Approaches***
e.g. balance between physical and psychological safety
- ***Barriers to Effective Multi-Agency Approaches to School VP*** – e.g. no current mechanism for some partners to access a STA for serious concerns



Gaps, Opportunities and Recommendations





Gaps

(8 of 13):

- Substantial **disparity in STA capacity**/expertise across partner organizations.
- **Lack of a shared/consistent language** related to STA and VP among partners.
- Current process **only available to some organizations**
- Connections between STA approaches to policy and **broader VP** not well articulated.
- Strategies to ensure **diversity and disability issues** are addressed are underdeveloped.
- Under-use of evaluation/**reflective review** across organizations (incl. basic counts of incidents and outcomes).
- **Information-sharing barriers** in practice despite enabling legislation.
- Strongly expressed need for clear communication in **post-incident follow-up**, especially when students are transferred across multiple organizations.



Opportunities

(6 of 10)

- **Shared vision/values** for safe students, schools and communities.
- Partners with greater capacity **willing to share**.
- Current **provincial policy** supports safe and caring schools.
- **Enabling legislation** (the Children First Act) for information-sharing.
- There are very **experienced, knowledgeable and supportive individuals** from all sectors that are supportive of a regional approach.
- Few **barriers** to working together on a collaborative regional approach.



Recommendations

(6 of 14)

- Develop a **common (Framework/Collaborative Process)** that is based in evidence and more explicitly connects to provincial policy, to a broader community and school VP concepts and includes at least the seven priority components
- Set up a **regular connection points** for all STA teams in the region for shared and continued learning/training. Model other cross-partner regional processes
- Develop **capacity for smaller districts** and other partners to access.
- Develop further **learning opportunities** based on priority learning needs (e.g. culturally safe STA approaches)
- Collect **common information** on threats and outcomes and share data at least annually.
- Include **regular case review/debrief** and reflective review about STA process improvement across partner organizations.



Questions?



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