In the wake of the tragic May 24, 2022, shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, policymakers have undertaken reviews of school safety and security at the federal and state levels. In 2018, Florida took quick action to pass comprehensive school safety and threat assessment requirements in the wake of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting. Experts across the United States have held up the measures taken by Florida in 2018 and during subsequent legislative sessions as a bipartisan model for successful comprehensive school safety reform. A crucial component of these measures is a strict requirement for local school districts to implement and publicize threat assessment protocols.

According to the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), 18 states require local school districts to adopt threat assessment policies or protocols. In comparison, five states encourage such policies, and 16 feature a non-codified threat assessment policy. Nationwide, only 14 states – including two in the South – do not have policies governing this issue.

This brief focuses on the six CSG South member states that have enacted legislation to codify or strengthen these threat assessment requirements – and the differences among these requirements.

**FLORIDA** lawmakers quickly enacted the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act (Senate Bill 7026) in March 2018 – a month after the devastating school shooting. Section 19 of the bill created a new School Safety Awareness Program. It required the state Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) – working with the Department of Legal Affairs – to procure a suspicious activity or threat reporting tool. The tool must allow students and the community to relay information anonymously concerning unsafe, potentially harmful, dangerous, violent, or criminal activities or the threat of these activities to the appropriate school and law enforcement officials. The final product, “FortifyFL,” was a mobile smartphone app created by the Florida Office of the Attorney General, Department of Education, and Department of Law Enforcement. Anonymously reported tips are routed to local school officials, law enforcement agencies, and state-level officials. Funding for the app was part of the initial $200 million appropriations included in the bill.

Further, Section 28 mandates that the Office of Safe Schools create a Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool (FSSAT). The FSSAT was designed to address, at a minimum, each of the following:
- School emergency and crisis preparedness training;
- Security, crime, and violence policies and procedures;
- Physical security measures;
- Professional development training needs;
- An examination of support service roles in school safety, security, and emergency planning;
- School security and school police staffing, operational practices, and related services;
- School and community collaboration on school safety; and
- A return on investment analysis of the recommended physical school security controls.

The measure appropriated $3 million in recurring funds for the centralized threat assessment and response depository. A follow-up measure, Senate Bill 7030 (2019), created language prioritizing the use of the risk assessment tool and required the collaboration of local school districts with all appropriate public safety agencies. Finally, the bill also created a working group to develop a statewide threat assessment database and determine its feasibility and costs to the state and districts.

While **GEORGIA** statute previously defined school safety plans, House Bill 763 (2018) enhanced existing law by adding new requirements. Specifically, the bill required school safety plans to, at a minimum, explicitly include:
- Training for school educators, administrators, and staff on school violence prevention, school security, school threat assessment, mental health awareness, and emergency planning best practices;
- Evaluating and refining school security measures;
- Updating and implementing school emergency preparedness plans; and
- Establishing enhanced crisis communications plans and social media strategies.

Notably, the measure also created a new requirement that – in addition to local emergency management – local law enforcement agencies must also receive a copy of public school threat assessment plans for review and approval. Public schools also received a new mandate to conduct drills based upon their threat assessment and safety plans according to guidance from the state Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency regarding timing, intervals, and duration. Lastly, the measure also exempts these school threat assessment plans from the state’s public records law.

In **KENTUCKY**, lawmakers enacted the School Safety and Resiliency Act of 2019 (Senate Bill 1) to overhaul existing and create new school security measures. The law amended the statute to require every school district to appoint a school safety coordinator whose duties – among other requirements – include designating a school safety and security threat assessment team at each school. This team must consist of two or more staff members to identify and respond to students exhibiting behavior that indicates a potential threat to school safety or security. Threat assessment team members may include school administrators, school counselors, school resource officers, school-based mental health services providers, teachers, and other school personnel. Each school district’s superintendent must also verify with the state school security marshal and the state Department of Education that all schools in their jurisdiction have completed a school security threat assessment for the prior year. Like Georgia, this assessment review is exempted from state public information disclosure laws. Additionally, state law requires all School Resource Officer training to include a course curriculum that addresses school threat assessments and responses. To supplement this law, the state Department of Education publically made available a list of Threat Assessment Tools developed by federal or state agencies for consideration by education officials.
The **MISSISSIPPI School Safety Act of 2019** (**House Bill 1283**) amends existing law to require public schools to participate in the state School Crisis Management Program. As part of this new requirement, the state Office of Homeland Security must create a curriculum and train and certify threat assessment officers. These threat assessment officers are required to conduct annual threat assessments and inspections at each public school in the state - and must include a review of surveillance equipment and building-specific floor plans. Post-inspection, officers must provide and develop an improvement plan for every school. Local law enforcement and school boards must receive a copy of this review and the improvement plan within four weeks of the inspection.

Following the tragic shooting at Santa Fe High School in 2019, lawmakers in **TEXAS** enacted **Senate Bill 11 (2019)** as a comprehensive school safety and security measure, emphasizing the importance of required school safety and threat assessments. The bill requires the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to collaborate with the newly established state School Safety Center to incorporate evidence-based best practices for school safety and threat assessments in its rules for safe and supportive schools. This requirement also mandates a multidisciplinary and multiagency collaboration to assess school risks and threats and provide appropriate interventions and regulations for establishing and operating threat assessment teams. The law also requires each school district to create both a threat assessment and a safe and supportive school team for each campus. The statute requires these teams to:

- Follow the model policies and procedures implemented and periodically revised by the Texas School Safety Center;
- Complete evidence-based threat assessment training and education administered by the state School Safety Center or a certified regional education service center;
- Comprise members with expertise in counseling, behavior management, mental health and substance abuse, classroom instruction, special education, school administration, school safety and security, emergency management, and law enforcement;
- Conduct threat assessments that include evaluating and reporting individuals making threats of violence or exhibiting threatening behavior and collecting and analyzing data to determine the risks of reported threats and the appropriate intervention;
- Publicly make available guidance to students and school staff regarding recognizing and reporting threats and the proper procedures for doing so; and
- Provide an annual report to the TEA regarding the team’s activities.

Per these requirements, the Texas School Safety Center has published a comprehensive Threat Assessment Toolkit to educate and assist education officials and local education authorities.

Legislation enacted in 2000 (**House Bill 391**) established the **VIRGINIA** Center for School Safety under the purview of the state Department of Criminal Justice Services. A subsequent bill in 2013 (**House Bill 2344**) mandated the center work with the Department of Education to develop a model policy for threat assessment teams and procedures. Further, the bill requires each local school board to create a threat assessment team and establish intervention protocols consistent with the model mentioned above. It also allows superintendents, at their discretion, to develop committees responsible for oversight of threat assessment teams - provided that committee members represent expertise in human resources, education, school administration, mental health, and law enforcement.

Upon identifying a student representing a threat to a school, the assessment team must immediately report to the superintendent, who must immediately notify the offending student's parents or guardians. However, school personnel can intervene directly in an immediate threat. The newly created statute also explicitly lays out the requirements for the threat assessment committee as follows:

- Comprising individuals with expertise in counseling, instruction, school administration, and law enforcement;
- Guide students, faculty, and staff regarding recognition of threatening or aberrant behavior that may represent a threat to the community, school, or self;
- Identify members of the school community to whom threatening behavior should be reported; and
- Implement policies adopted by the local school board according to the state model policies.

In 2019, via **Senate Bill 1213**, Virginia further amended its statutes to require the development of a centralized case management tool to gather and report data collected by threat assessment teams throughout the state. All threat assessment teams were further required to register and log all data collected into this statewide case management system. This reform better organized and analyzed the data collected by local schools and districts to be utilized statewide.