

## ***The Prevention of School Violence***

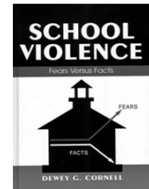
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Dr. Cornell has studied youth violence for nearly 30 years and has assisted numerous schools in the development of violence prevention programs. He has authored more than 200 publications in psychology and education, including: *Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence* and *School Violence: Fears versus Facts*.



## **Overview**

1. Our schools are safe.
2. Prevention is effective
3. School climate is critical to bullying prevention.
4. Use threat assessment, not zero tolerance.

**School shootings generate increased fear that can lead to over-reactions.**

### **Sandy Hook Shooting Inspires Bulletproof Kids Clothing**



**Fear mongering**

## **Zero Tolerance Suspensions**



**9 year old with toy gun**



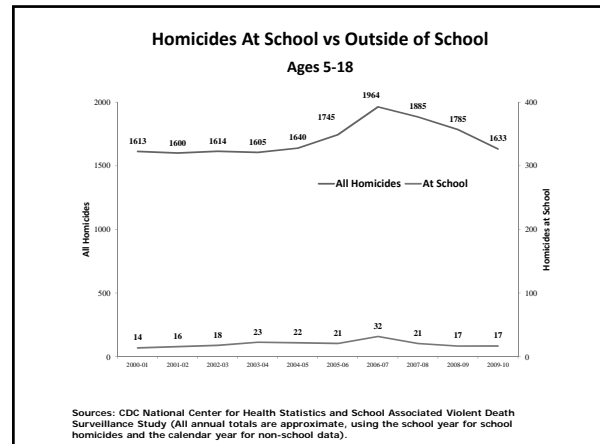
**12 year old doodler**



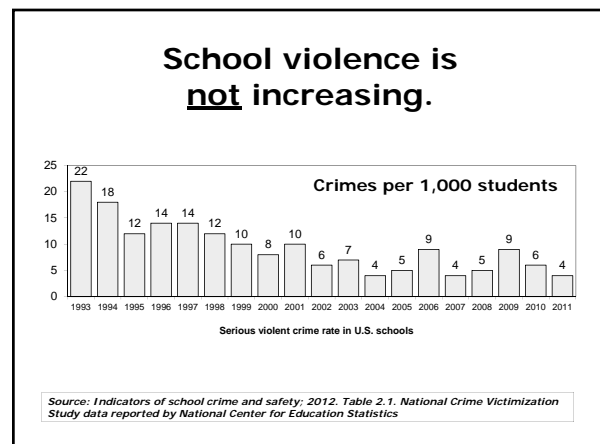
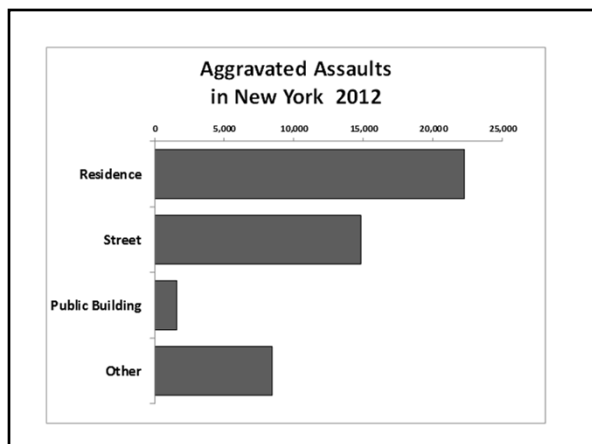
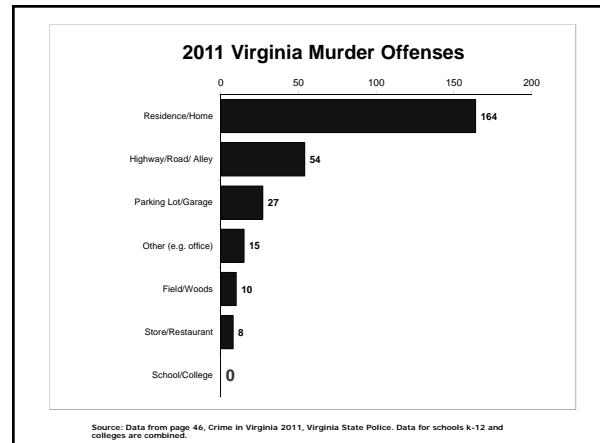
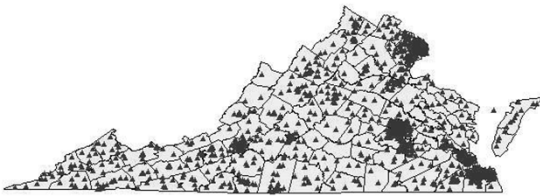
**Poem about Sandy Hook, "I understand the killings..."**

<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/education/desk-doodling-toy-gun-incidents-clear-educators-lack-common-sense-article-1.194105>  
<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/california-teen-suspended-newtown-poem-article-1.1230655>

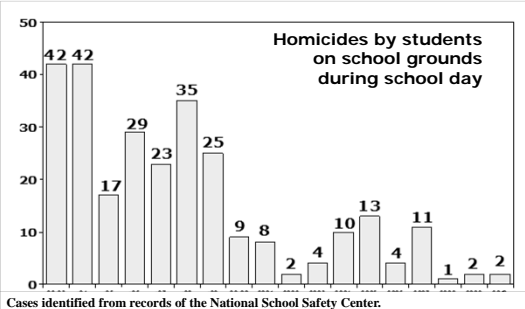
**Objectively,  
our schools are safe.**



**Where do violent crimes  
occur in Virginia?**



### School homicides are not increasing.



### What is the likelihood of a student committing a homicide at your school?

- **93** student homicides cases in 10 years = 9.3/year (1992-93 to 2001-02)
- **119,000** schools
- $119,000 \div 9.3/\text{year} =$
- **1 case every 12,796 years**

### Where do we need police protection?

- Location A -- highest crime rate
- Location B -- medium crime rate
- Location C -- lowest crime rate

Unless we have unlimited police resources, we should place any additional officers in locations with the highest crime rates.

### What if the media devotes 95% of its coverage to crime in Location C?

- Location A -- highest crime rate
- Location B -- medium crime rate
- Location C -- lowest crime rate

Media coverage should not compromise an objective assessment of crime rates and security needs.

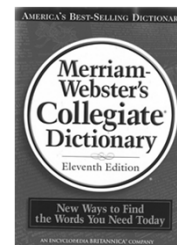
### Arming our teachers is not that easy

Gun group offers training for Utah teachers



Cherline Caldwell, left, receives firearms training with a Glock from personal defense instructor, Jim McCarthy during concealed weapons training for 200 Utah teachers Thursday, Dec. 27, 2012, in West Valley City, Utah. The Utah Shooting Sports Council offered six hours of training in handling concealed weapons in the latest effort to arm teachers to confront school assailants. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer)

### Prevention means "to keep something from happening"



**Crisis response is not  
prevention.**



A crisis occurs when prevention has failed.

**Prevention must start  
before the gunman is  
at your door.**



**Critics say,  
“We can’t *predict* who  
will be violent,  
so prevention is not  
possible.”**

**However,....**

**Prevention does not  
require prediction.**



We cannot predict who will have an accident, but safety regulations make safer roads, cars, and drivers.

**Prevention does not  
require prediction.**



We cannot predict who will get cancer, but we can identify risk and protective factors that reduce cancer rates dramatically.

**How do we know  
whether prevention  
works?**

Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology  
2003, Vol. 71, No. 2, 108-148

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0893-3200/03/\$12.00 DOI: 10.1037/0022-006X.71.2.108

### The Effects of School-Based Intervention Programs on Aggressive Behavior: A Meta-Analysis

Sandra Jo Wilson and Mark W. Lipsey  
Vanderbilt University

James H. Derron  
Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation

Research on the effectiveness of school-based programs for preventing or reducing aggressive behavior was synthesized with a meta-analysis. Changes in aggressive behavior between pretest and posttest were analyzed for developmental patterns and characteristics associated with differential effects. Control groups showed little change in aggressive behavior, but there were significant reductions among intervention groups. Meta findings were consistent on demonstration programs, but few studies of routine practice programs showed much smaller effects. Among demonstration programs, positive outcomes were associated with a variety of study, subject, and intervention characteristics. Most notably, higher risk youth showed greater reductions in aggressive behavior, poorly implemented programs produced smaller effects, and different types of programs were generally similar in their effectiveness, other things equal.

Reviewed 221 studies of diverse school-based violence prevention programs  
Average effect size = .25 for demonstration programs, which would reduce fighting 50% in a typical school

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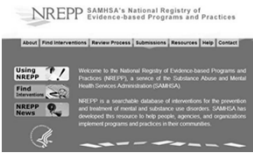
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- Routine practice programs much less effective than demonstration programs (ES .10 vs .25)
- Need to study routine school practices.


### Numerous Effective Programs

- Anger management
- Bullying prevention
- Conflict resolution
- Family therapy
- Parenting skills
- Problem-solving
- Social competence
- Substance abuse resistance
- Etc.



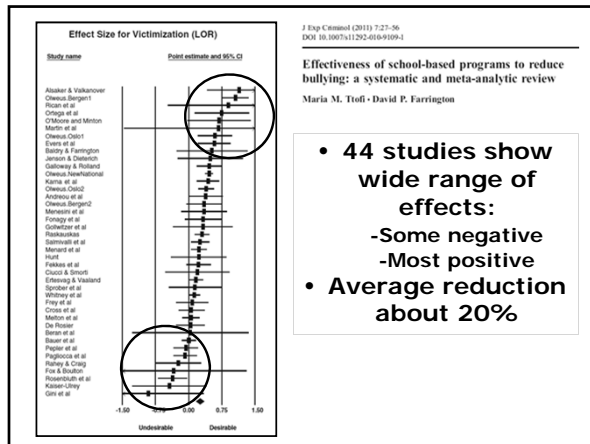
### Many school-based prevention programs have not been evaluated.

### Do bullying prevention programs work?



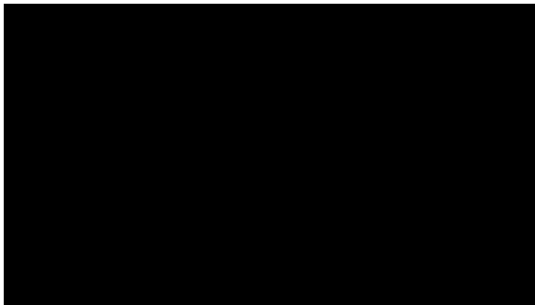
Q: Do you have any data that supports your program?  
A: We are currently working on an efficiency study for the near future. So far, most of our data is anecdotal.

### Many school-based bullying prevention programs have yielded disappointing results.



**Maybe formal programs alone are not enough.**

## Be the Hero



Created by students at Albemarle High School  
<http://youtu.be/6JLMRtIAo>

**You do not have to be a super-hero to stop bullying.**

**Nor should schools just rely on a super program.**



**Formal programs alone are not enough.**

**Schools need a school climate that encourages appropriate student behavior.**

## Survey of principals

Two contrasting groups

- "Get-tough" strict discipline-oriented
- "Be supportive" prevention-oriented

Source: Skiba & Edl, 2004

## Classic study of parents

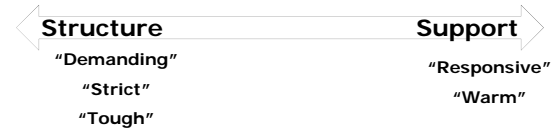
Two contrasting groups

- "Authoritarian" strict discipline-oriented
- "Permissive" lacking in discipline

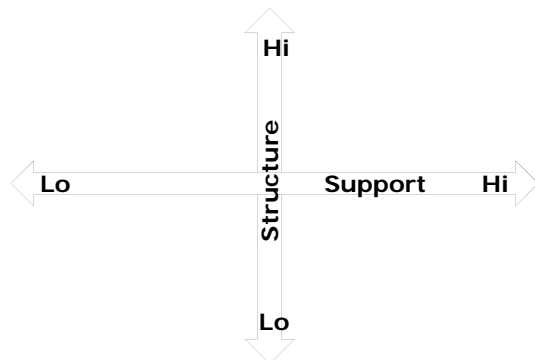
Source: Baumrind, 1966

## One dimension....

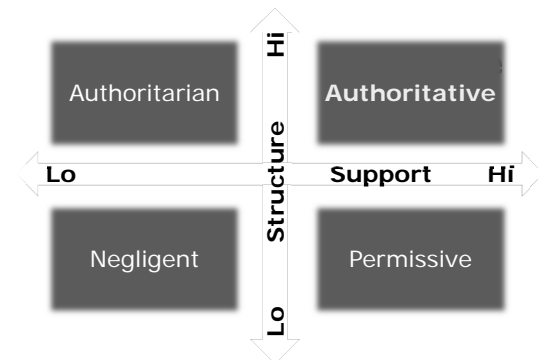
Many people intuitively think that being tough and being supportive are opposites on a continuum.



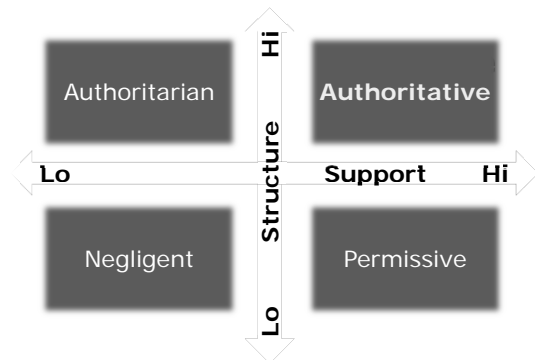
## Or two dimensions?



## Four types of parenting



## Four types of school climate



## Virginia High School Safety Study

How are structure and support related to student bullying and victimization?

7,400 ninth grade students  
and 2,300 teachers in 290  
Virginia high schools

Journal of Educational Psychology  
2010, Vol. 102, No. 2, 403–409  
© 2010 American Psychological Association  
0022-0665/10/\$12.00 DOI: 10.1037/a0018902

**Authoritative School Discipline:  
High School Practices Associated With Lower Bullying and Victimization**

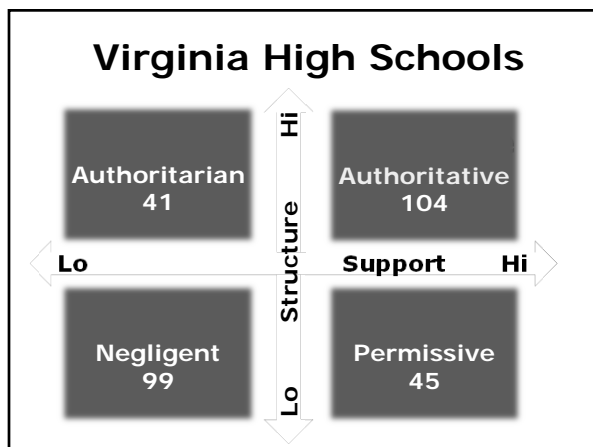
Anne Gregory, Dewey Cornell, Xitao Fan, Peter Sheras, Tse-Hua Shih, and Francis Huang  
University of Virginia

In this study we examined authoritative discipline theory, which posits that 2 complementary aspects of school climate—structure and support—are important for adolescents' safety in school. Using a statewide sample of over 7,500 ninth-grade students and 2,000 teachers randomly selected from 290 high schools, we showed, using hierarchical linear modeling, that consistent enforcement of school discipline (structure) and availability of caring adults (support) were associated with school safety. Structure and support were associated with less bullying and victimization after we controlled for size of school enrollment and the proportion of ethnic minority and low-income students. These findings suggest that discipline practices should not be polarized into a "get tough" versus "give support" debate because both structure and support contribute to school safety for adolescents.

**Virginia high school safety study**

## School Climate Scales

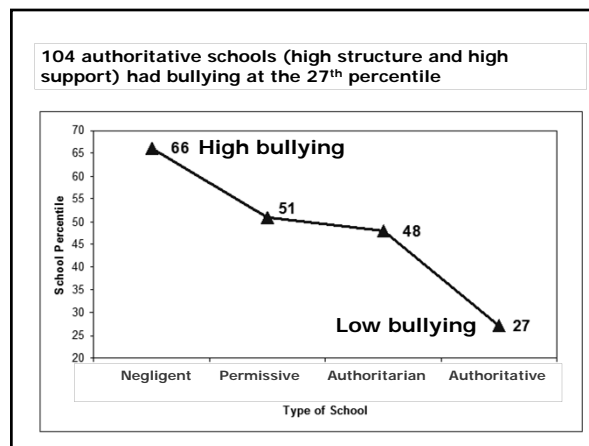
1. Structure
  - Rules are strictly enforced, but fair
2. Support
  - Teachers treat me with respect, willing to seek help from them.



Bullying Climate Scale	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	Agree/ Strongly Agree
Bullying is a problem at this school.	53	47
Students here often get teased about their clothing or physical appearance.	29	71
Students here often get put down because of their race or ethnicity.	65	35
There is a lot of teasing about sexual topics at this school.	45	55

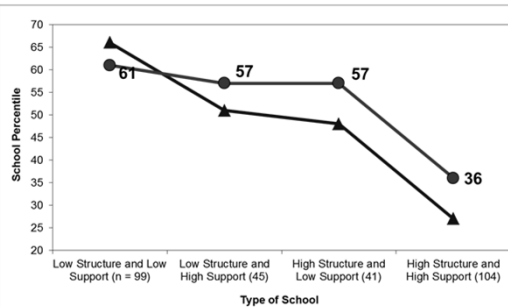
- Stable factor structure
- Works for males and females, grades 6-12, white and minority students
- Teacher and student versions

Victimization	False	True
This year in school have any of the following happened to you personally in the school?		
Damage to personal property worth more than \$10.	85	15
Theft of personal property worth more than \$10.	80	20
Was physically attacked and had to see a doctor	96	4
Was physically attacked, but not serious enough to see a doctor.	87	13
Received obscene remarks or gestures from a student.	49	51
Was threatened in remarks by a student.	72	28
Had a weapon pulled on me.	96	4

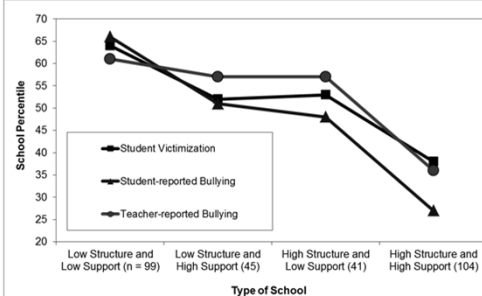




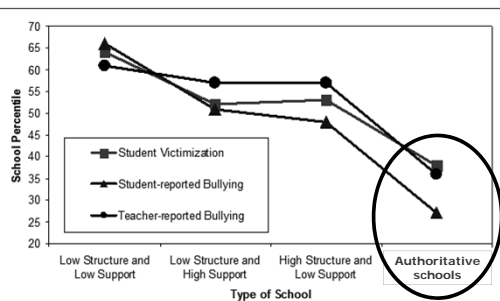
**Results using TEACHER perceptions were consistent with STUDENT perceptions.**



**Similar results for a broader measure of student victimization (e.g., theft, assault, threats)**



**Schools with least structure and support have the highest rates of bullying and student victimization.**



## Virginia High School Safety Study

Schools do not have to choose between “get tough” and “be supportive” policies, but should strive for both. However, rules must be enforced in a fair and consistent manner that respects and supports students.

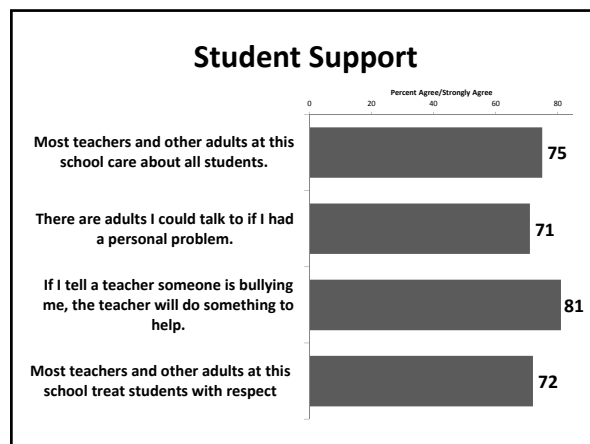
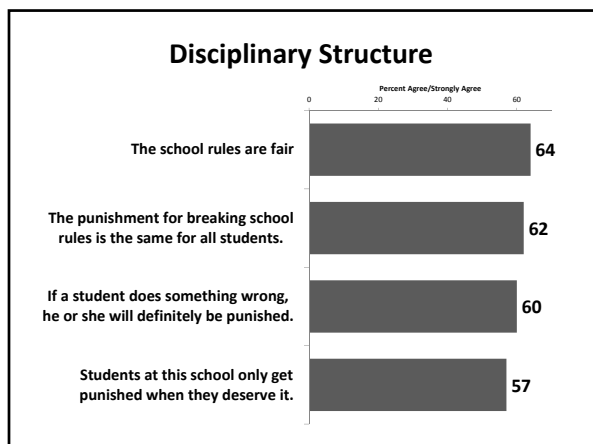
**Would results from high schools extend to middle schools?**



## Virginia Middle School Climate Survey

**423 Schools (98%)  
9,134 Teachers (79%)  
43,805 Students 7-8 (85%)**

<http://curry.virginia.edu/research/projects/virginia-secondary-school-climate-study>

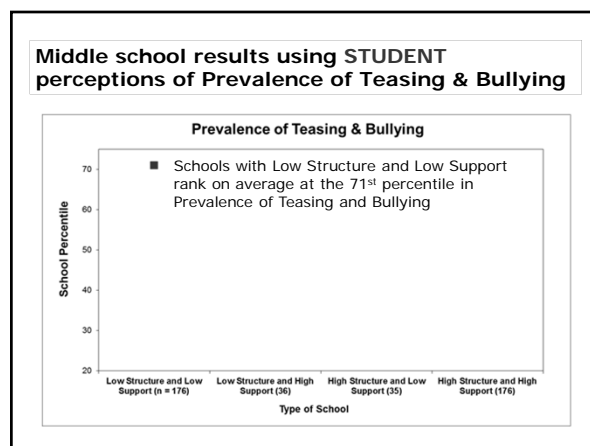
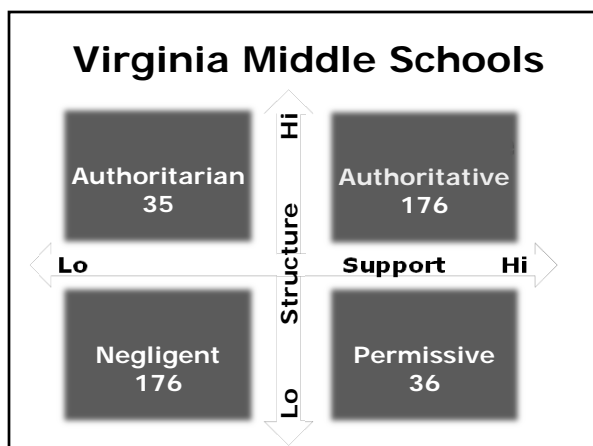


Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying Scale	
Bullying is a problem at this school.	53
Students here often get teased about their clothing or physical appearance.	71
Students here often get put down because of their race or ethnicity.	37
There is a lot of teasing about sexual topics at this school.	54
Students here get teased or put down about their sexual orientation.	40
Students get teased or put down about their religion at this school.	22
Students treat one another with respect in this school (reverse scored for scale)	46

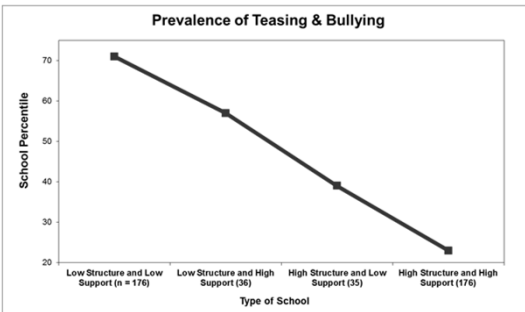
### Schools with high structure and high support:

Findings are consistent across schools regardless of:

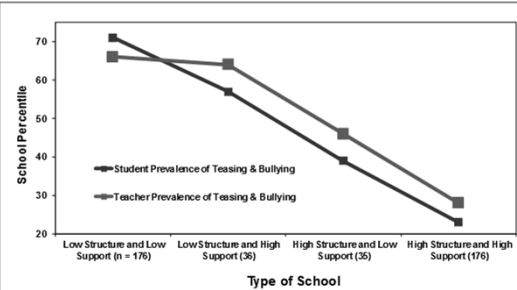
- School size
- Student poverty %
- Minority students %
- Urbanicity



**Middle school results using STUDENT perceptions of Prevalence of Teasing & Bullying**



**Middle school results using STUDENT and Teacher perceptions of Prevalence of Teasing & Bullying**

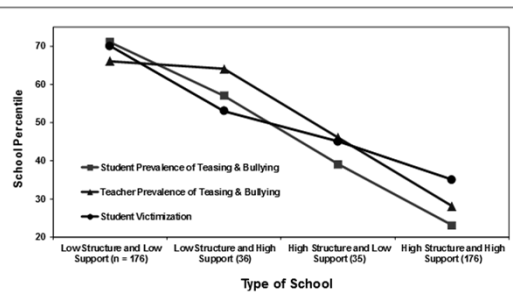


#### Middle School General Victimization

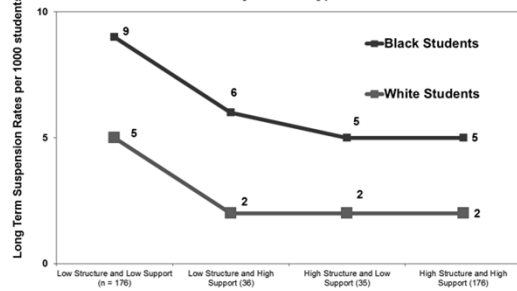
Have any of the following happened to you personally at school this year? This includes while you are going to or from school. This also includes school events like field trips, school dances, and sports events.

	One or more times
A student stole my personal property.	42
A student physically attack, pushed, or hit me.	36
A student threatened to hurt me.	34
A student threatened me with a weapon.	9
A student said mean or insulting things to me.	63

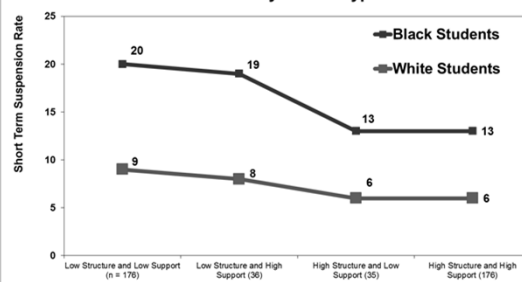
**Middle school results using STUDENT and Teacher perceptions of Prevalence of Teasing & Bullying and Student General Victimization**



**Long Term Suspension Rates for Black and White Students by School Type**



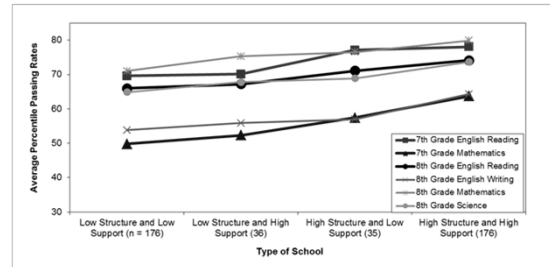
**Short Term Suspension Rates for Black and White Students by School Type**



**How is school climate related to school performance on state-mandated testing?**



## School Climate and SOL Passing Rates



**Case example: How schools permit and even promote bullying**

- School newspaper
- Rest room monitoring
- Hallway teasing
- Classroom mischief
- Uneven enforcement
- Marching band initiation
- Gym class humiliation
- Group rivalry

## Contributing Factors

**Bullying  
Mental Illness  
Peer Influences  
Access to guns**



## Prevention Opportunities

**Bullying  
Mental Illness  
Peer Influences  
Access to guns**



## Why is snitching so reviled?

**Snitch:** blabbermouth, canary, fink, narc, rat, sneak, squealer, stoolie, stoolpigeon, tattletale, etc.



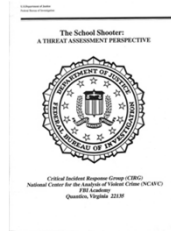
## Teach students to distinguish snitching from seeking help

**Snitching:** informing on someone  
for personal gain

**Seeking help:** attempting to stop  
someone from  
being hurt



## FBI Recommendations on School Violence



Download at  
[www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)

“Although the risk of an actual shooting incident at any one school is very low, threats of violence are potentially a problem at any school. Once a threat is made, having a fair, rational, and standardized method of evaluating and responding to threats is critically important.” (FBI report p 1)



Download at:  
[www.secretservice.gov](http://www.secretservice.gov)

### *Secret Service/DOE Recommendations:*

- Create a planning team to develop a threat assessment program.
- Identify roles for school personnel.
- Clarify role of law enforcement.
- Conduct threat assessments of students who make threats of violence.

## What is Threat Assessment?

**Threat assessment is a problem-solving approach to violence prevention that involves assessment and intervention with students who have threatened violence in some way.**

## Threat Assessment

1. *Identification* of threats made by students.
2. *Evaluation* of seriousness of threat and danger it poses to others, recognizing that all threats are not the same (e.g., toy guns are not dangerous).
3. *Intervention* to reduce risk of violence.
4. *Follow-up* to assess intervention results.



***Threat assessment is not designed to determine whether a student has MADE a threat, but whether a student POSES a threat.***

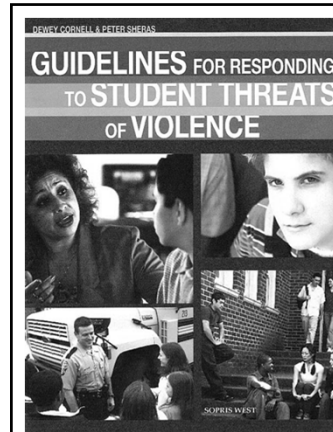




## Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence

A collaborative project of:  
University of Virginia Curry School of Education  
Albemarle County Public Schools  
Charlottesville City Public Schools

Funded by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund



- Legally defensible procedures for responding to student threats
- Step-by-step guidelines and decision-tree
- Research-based and field-tested
- Covers K-12, regular and special education

Available from  
**sopriswest.com**

## Goals of Threat Assessment

1. Prevent violence.
2. Address problems such as bullying before they escalate.
3. Reduce use of school suspension
4. Improve student trust in staff.

## Team roles

Principal or Assistant Principal	Leads team, conducts Step 1.
School Resource Officer	Advises team, responds to illegal actions and emergencies.
Mental Health Staff (School counselors, psychologists, social workers)	Team member to conduct mental health assessments. Team member to take lead role in follow-up interventions.
Not required to serve on team Teachers, aides, other staff	Report threats, provide input to team. No additional workload.

School divisions may further specify team roles and include other staff to meet local needs.

## No Magic Formula or Crystal Ball

There is no formula, prescription, or checklist that will predict or prevent all violent acts. School authorities must make reasoned judgments based on the facts of each individual situation, and monitor situations over time.



## What is a threat?

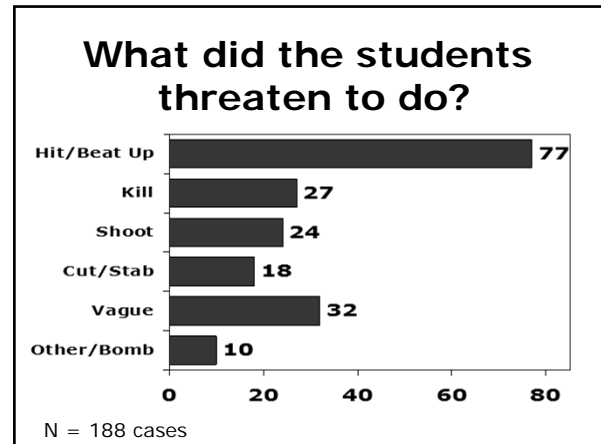
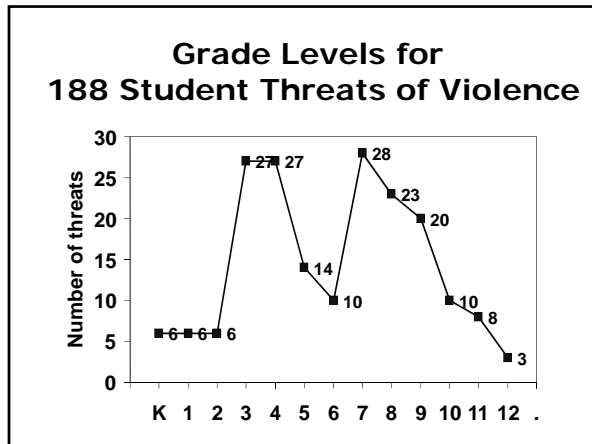
***A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone.***


Threats may be spoken, written, or gestured.

Threats may be direct or indirect, and need not be communicated to the intended victim or victims.  
("I'm going to get him.")

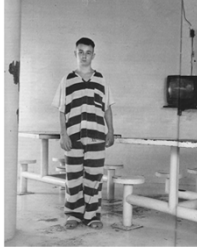
Weapon possession is presumed to be a threat unless circumstances clearly indicate otherwise.  
("I forgot my knife was in my backpack.")


When in doubt, assume it is a threat.




 **Key Point**

***A primary goal of threat assessment is to prevent violence.***

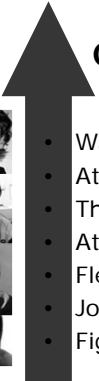


 **Key Point**


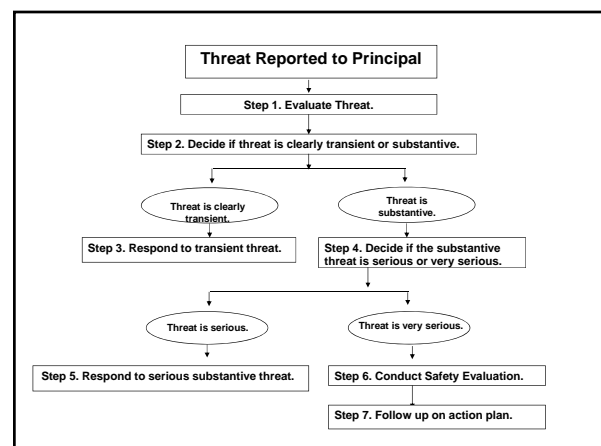
***Just screaming or having a tantrum is not a threat. The question is whether the student expresses intent to harm someone.***



### Continuum of Threats



- Warning of impending violence
- Attempts to intimidate or frighten
- Thrill of causing a disruption
- Attention-seeking, boasting
- Fleeting expressions of anger
- Jokes
- Figures of speech

## Step 1. Evaluate the threat.

- Obtain an account of the threat and the context from the student and witnesses.
- Write down the exact threat.
- Obtain student's explanation of the threat's meaning and his/her intentions.
- Obtain witness perceptions of the threat's meaning.

Document your evaluation.

## Typical Questions

1. Do you know why I wanted to talk to you?
2. What happened today when you were [place of incident]?
3. What exactly did you say and do?
4. What did you mean when you said/did that?
5. How do you think [person threatened] feels about what you said?
6. What was the reason you said that?
7. What you going to do now?



## Witness Questions

1. What happened today when you were [place of incident]?
2. What exactly did [student who made threat] say and do?
3. What do you think he/she meant?
4. How do you feel about what he/she said?
5. Why did he/she say that?



## All threats are not the same.

"I could just kill you for that!" (laughing)

"I'm gonna kick your butt."

"There's a bomb in the school."

"Wait until I get my gun!"

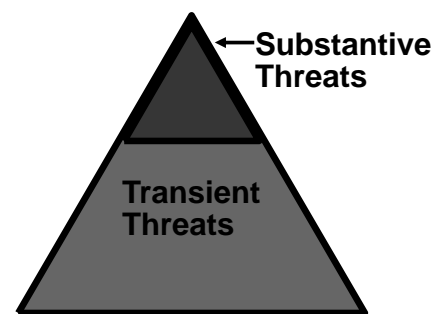
"Let's really make them pay for what they did."

Context matters...

## Step 2. Transient or Substantive?

- Determine whether the threat is transient or substantive.
- The critical issue is not what the student threatened to do, but whether the student intends to carry out the threat.
- When in doubt, treat a threat as substantive.

## Transient versus substantive threats





## Transient threats

- Often are rhetorical remarks, not genuine expressions of intent to harm.
- At worst, express temporary feelings of anger or frustration.
- Usually can be resolved on the scene or in the office.
- After resolution, the threat no longer exists.
- Usually end with an apology or clarification.

## Substantive threats

- Express intent to physically injure someone beyond the immediate situation.
- There is at least some risk the student will carry out the threat.
- Require that you take protective action, including warning intended victims and parents.
- May be legal violations and require police consultation.
- When in doubt, treat threats as substantive.

## Substantive threats: Factors to consider

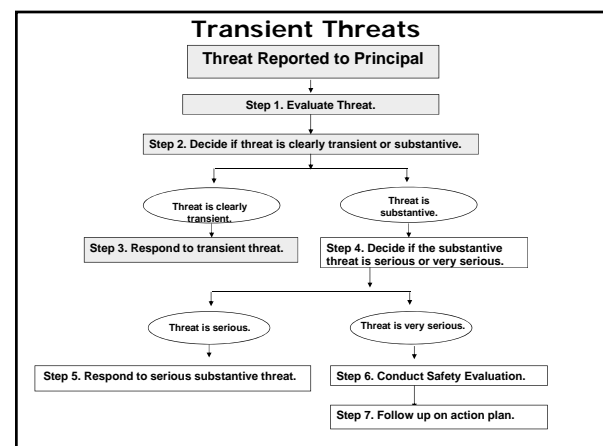
- Age of student
- Capability of student to carry out the threat
- Student's discipline history
- Credibility of student and willingness to acknowledge his or her behavior
- Credibility of witness accounts
- When in doubt, treat threats as substantive.

## Presumptive indicators of substantive threats

- Specific, plausible details. ("I am going to blast Mr. Johnson with my pistol.")
- Threat has been repeated over time. ("He's been telling everyone he is going to get you.")
- Threat reported as a plan ("Wait until you see what happens next Tuesday in the library.")
- Accomplices or recruitment of accomplices.
- Physical evidence of intent (written plans, lists of victims, bomb materials, etc.)

## Case examples: Transient or substantive threat?

1. Two elementary students to throw paper wads pretending to bomb one another.
2. Two middle school students get in a shoving match. One says, "I'm gonna bust you up."
3. A boy turns in an English essay that describes an especially violent scene from a war.
4. Two students get into a fight. After they are separated, both are sullen and quiet.
5. A student says he is being bullied. He was warned that if he told anyone, they would beat him up.



### Step 3. Responses to a transient threat.

- No need to take safety precautions.
- See that threat is resolved through explanation, apology, making amends.
- Provide counseling and education where appropriate.
- Administer discipline if appropriate.



***Students DO NOT have to be suspended for making a threatening statement.***

***Many threats can be resolved without suspension.***

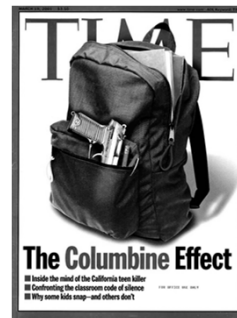


## Zero Tolerance

**A policy that mandates a severe punishment that is applied to all violations regardless of the circumstances.**

From APA Zero Tolerance Task Force Report, 2006

## The Expansion of Zero Tolerance



From No Guns to

- No Toy Guns
- No Nail clippers
- No Plastic utensils
- No Finger-pointing
- No Jokes
- No Drawings
- No Rubber band shooting

*No Accidental violations*

## Nervous Officials No Longer Ignoring Threats by Students

Around the Country, Children Are Being Arrested

- 4 Kindergarten students suspended for playing cops and robbers during recess.
- New Jersey district zero tolerance policy resulted in 50 suspensions in 6 weeks, mostly in kindergarten and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade for verbal threats.
- 8 yr old suspended for pointing a chicken finger at a teacher, saying pow-pow
- 10 yr old expelled for a 1" GI Joe toy gun
- 14 yr old convicted of felony for e-mail threat
- 17 yr old arrested & expelled for shooting a paper clip with a rubber band

## The disconnect between youth violence and school safety practices

**Cub Scout utensil gets boy, 6, school suspension**  
First-grader brought it to eat his lunch with; now he's facing reform school

By Mike Celizic  
TODAYShow.com contributor  
updated 25 minutes ago

Dressed in a button-down shirt and tie and speaking calmly and articulately, first-grader Zachary Christie hardly looks or acts like the sort of kid who should be spending 45 days in reform school. But, thanks to a zero-tolerance policy, that's where Zachary's Delaware school system wants him to go after he made the mistake of taking his favorite camping utensil to



of fork, spoon, has been got it to take is. "He eats rything else, so i would have e 6-year-old's JAY's Meredith



On First-grader suspended over camping utensil Oct. 13 6-year-old Zachary Christie was suspended after he brought a camping utensil to school. TODAY's Meredith Vieira talks to Zachary, his mother, Debbie, and her fiance, Lee Irving, about the incident. Today shows

APA Press Release  
August 9, 2008  
Contact Pam Voller  
APA Public Affairs Office  
(202) 336-5707 (until 8/8)  
(202) 336-5771 (between 8/9-8/13)  
EPAJ

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES ARE NOT AS EFFECTIVE AS THOUGHT IN REDUCING VIOLENCE AND PROMOTING LEARNING IN SCHOOL, SAYS APA TASK FORCE**

Research Finds that Mandatory Discipline Can Actually Increase Bad Behavior and Drop Out Rates in Middle and Secondary Students

NEW ORLEANS -- A review of the school discipline research shows that zero tolerance policies developed in the 1980s to stop drug use and curtail unruly and violent behavior in schools are not as successful as thought in creating safer environments to learn. These policies, which mandate that schools severely punish disruptive students regardless of the infraction or its rationale, can actually increase bad behavior and also lead to higher drop out rates, according to the American Psychological Association's (APA) report. Based on these results, the APA today adopted a resolution recommending ways to target discipline more effectively in order to keep schools safe while also eliminating the need for a one-size-fits-all punishment for misbehavior.



Zero tolerance is not effective.  
Suspension associated with poorer outcomes for students.

## Suspension Practices

Suspension is a practice that has more negative than positive effects on students:

- Fall behind in their classes
- Feel alienated and rejected
- Continue to misbehave and be suspended
- Drop out of school
- Juvenile court involvement

The school-to-prison pipeline

Key Point

**Zero tolerance is not needed for student threats of violence. Threat assessment is a more flexible and effective alternative.**

## Transient Case Steps

**Step 1. Evaluate the threat.**

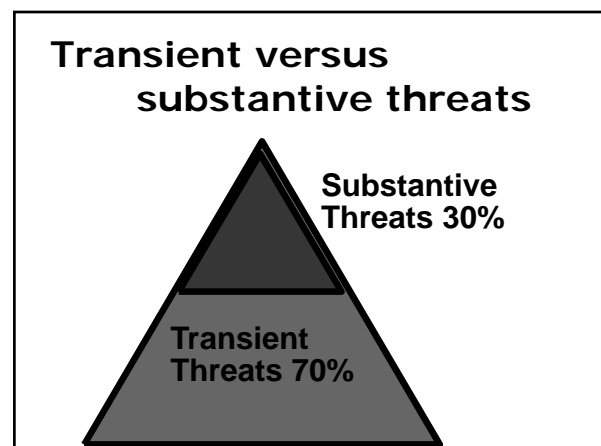
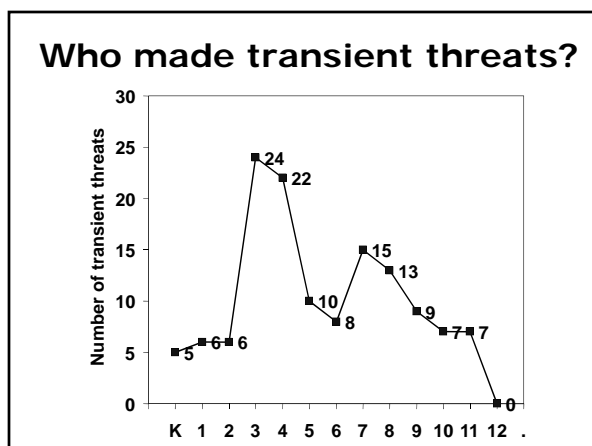
- Obtain a specific account of the threat by interviewing the student who made threat, the intended victim, and other witnesses.
- Write down the exact content of threat and statements by each party.
- Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made and the student's intentions.

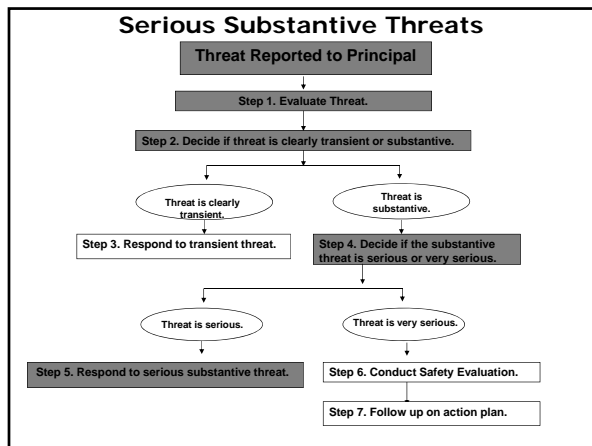
**Step 2. Decide whether the threat is transient or substantive.**

- Consider criteria for transient versus substantive threats.
- Consider student's age, credibility, and previous discipline history.

**Step 3. Respond to transient threat.**

- Typical responses may include reprimand, parental notification, or other disciplinary action.
- Student may need to make amends and attend mediation or counseling.

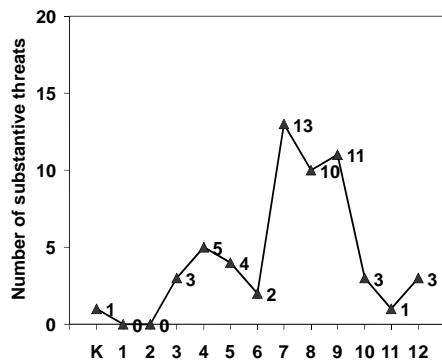




### Step 4. Serious or very serious substantive threat?

- Substantive assault threats are classified **serious**. ("I'm gonna beat him up.")
- Substantive threats to kill, rape, or inflict very serious injury are classified **very serious**. ("I'm gonna break his arm.")
- Substantive threats involving a weapon are classified **very serious**.

### Who made substantive threats?



### Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.

- Take precautions to protect potential victims. May consult with law enforcement.
- Notify intended victim and victim's parents.
- Notify student's parents.
- Discipline student for threat.
- Determine appropriate intervention for student, such as counseling or dispute mediation.
- Follow up to verify that threat has been resolved and interventions in progress.

### Substantive Case Steps

#### Step 1. Evaluate the threat.

- Interview the student who made threat and any witnesses.
- Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made, the student's intentions, and the victims' interpretations of the threat.

#### Step 2. Decide whether the threat is transient or substantive.

- Does the student express remorse and retract the threat?
- Is the student willing to make amends or resolve the conflict?
- What is the student's history of discipline problems?

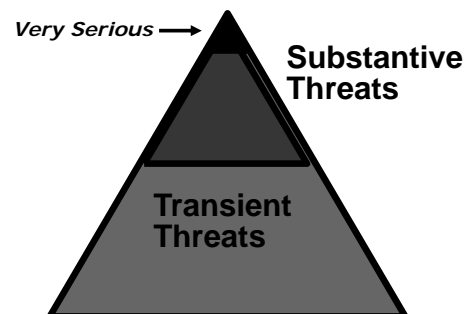
#### Step 4. Decide whether the threat is serious or very serious.

- Did this threat involve a weapon, or a threat to kill, rape, or inflict severe injury?

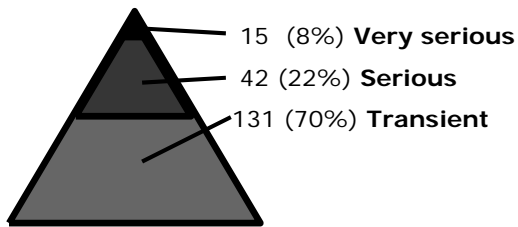
#### Step 5. Respond to the serious substantive threat.

- Take protective action by notifying parents of perpetrator and victims.
- Take disciplinary action consistent with school policy.
- Identify any other student support or intervention needs.

### Very serious cases are relatively rare

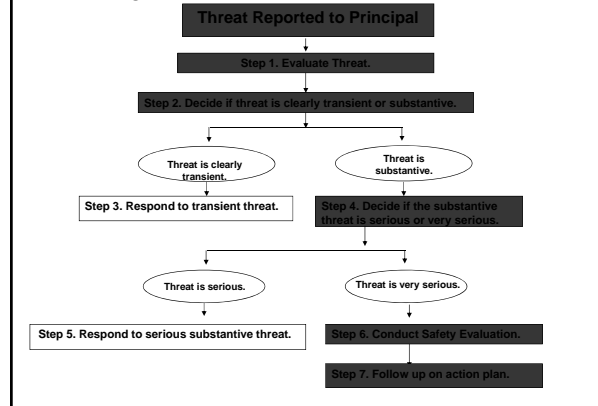


## How many student threats?



188 Total threats reported  
16,434 Students

## Very Serious Substantive Threats



## Step 6. Conduct a Safety Evaluation for a Very Serious Substantive Threat.

Safety Evaluation conducted by a team.

- Principal leads the team.
- School psychologist or other mental health professional conducts Mental Health Assessment.
- School resource officer consults on legal issues.
- School counselor leads intervention planning.



*In a threat assessment, we try to determine **why** a student made a threat, and therefore how we can **prevent** the threat from being carried out.*

## Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8<sup>th</sup> Grade John

- 8<sup>th</sup> grade John reported by another student to have a hit list.
- Tells former girlfriend, "I'm gonna get even with you and all your friends by blowing you all away with a shotgun."
- John denies hit list or threatening statement. Later acknowledges anger at several classmates and at Alice, his former girlfriend.

## Immediate responses to a Very Serious Substantive Threat

- Take precautions to protect potential victims.
- Consult with law enforcement promptly.
- Notify intended victim and victim's parents.
- Notify student's parents.
- Begin Mental Health Assessment.
- Determine safety during suspension.

### Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8<sup>th</sup> Grade John

- Principal contacted SRO. They inquire about John's access to firearms.
- Parents summoned to school. John is suspended, referred for evaluation.
- Parents of victims are informed of threat, reassured about school's actions.

### Law Enforcement Investigation of Very Serious Substantive Threats

- Interview suspects and witnesses.
- Conduct searches for weapons and other evidence of planning.
- Serve as a resource for students with fears or information to share.
- Take appropriate protective action.

### Mental Health Assessment

- Not a prediction model.
- Identify any mental health needs.
- Identify reasons why threat was made.
- Propose strategies for reducing risk.



*Our mental health assessments are not designed to **PREDICT** violence, but to find ways to **PREVENT** violence.*

### Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8<sup>th</sup> Grade John

- John describes feeling rejected by Alice, teased by other boys.
- John admits hit list. Denies intent to hurt anyone. "They was messing with me and I was messing back."
- John is willing to attend mediation sessions.

### Very Serious Substantive Threat: Case Example of 8<sup>th</sup> Grade John

- John's mother reports that John was treated for depression, stopped his medication a few months ago.
- John is stressed over parental separation and conflict.
- John does not have history of violence, does not have ready access to firearms.



### Typical Threat 1

- On interview, the student says he has no plans to harm the classmate and that he just lost his temper. He offers to apologize.
- What kind of threat?

### Typical Threat 2

- A student tells a friend that he is going to beat up Joe in the back parking lot after school today. The friend tells you.
- What do you do?

### Typical Threat 2

- On interview, the student denies making such a statement. He says that what he does after school is his own business.
- What kind of threat?

### Typical Threat 3

- A student sends an email threatening to “blow away the preps” at school. When interviewed, the boy says he has a right to free speech. He has a history of discipline problems and students say they are worried.
- What kind of threat?
- What do you do?

### Typical Threat 3

- A student sends an email threatening to “blow away the preps” at school. When interviewed, the boy says he has a right to free speech. He has a history of discipline problems and students say they are worried.
- This threat is **substantive** because it cannot be easily resolved. It is **very serious** because it involves a threat to kill.



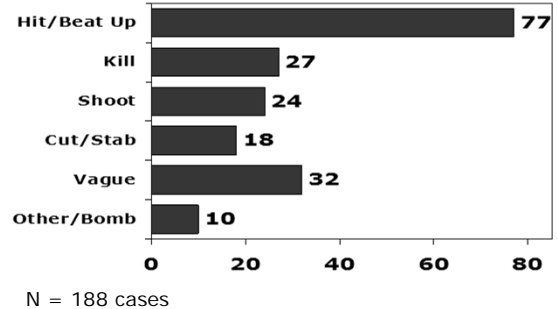
### Research on Threat Assessment

1. Initial field-test study
2. Memphis field test
3. High school climate study
4. High school suspension study
5. Randomized controlled trial

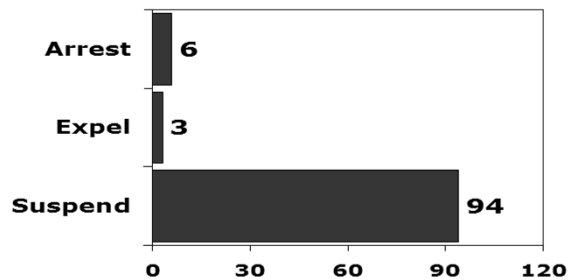




## What did the students threaten to do?



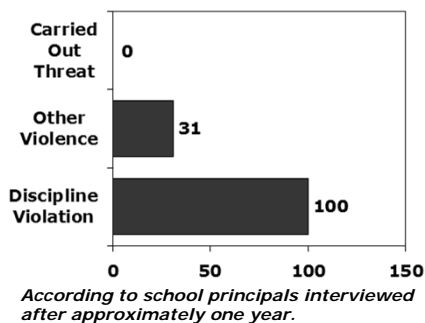
## How did schools respond to 188 threats?



## Follow-up interviews on student threats

- Interviews conducted with school principals at end of school year and again the following fall.
- Follow-up time periods averaged 148 days until end of school year.
- Four students did not return to school after the threat, 17 left within 30 days after threat.

## Follow-up on student behavior after the threat




## Memphis Field-Trial

Memphis Public Schools resolved 209 threats in 194 schools, including 110 threats to kill, shoot, or stab.

- 5 permanent expulsions, 3 incarcerations
- Office referrals declined >50%
- No reports of any threats carried out

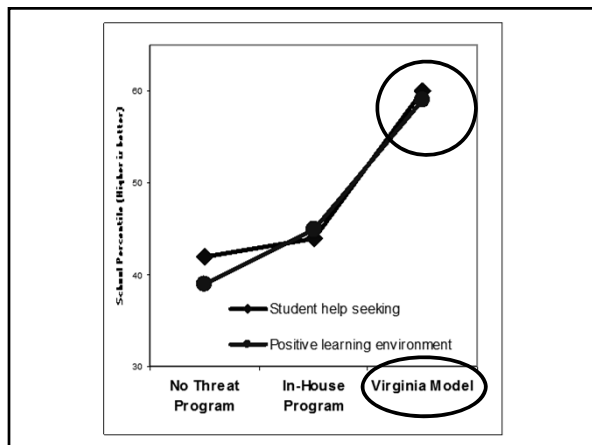
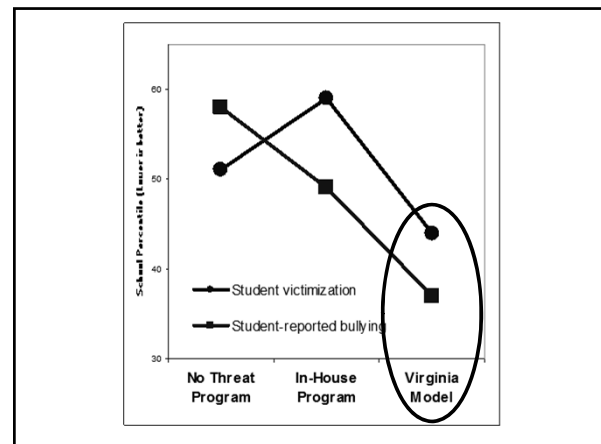
*Behavioral Disorders, 2008*




## Virginia High School Threat Assessment Study

- 95 high schools using the UVA threat assessment model
- 131 using locally developed models
- 54 not using threat assessment

*School Psychology Quarterly, 2009*





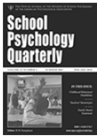
## Virginia High School Threat Assessment Study

### Findings for Virginia Model Schools

- Less bullying and other victimization
- Greater student willingness to seek help
- Perceive adults as more caring and fair
- Fewer long-term suspensions

Controlled for school size, poverty, minority %, school security measures, and neighborhood violent crime.

*School Psychology Quarterly, 2009*

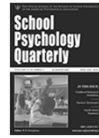


## Virginia High School Climate Study

### Findings for Virginia Model Schools

- Less bullying and other victimization
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*School Psychology Quarterly, 2009*



## Virginia High School Climate Study

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- Greater student willingness to seek help
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Controlled for school size, poverty, minority %, school security measures, and neighborhood violent crime.


*School Psychology Quarterly, 2009*

### Reductions in Long-Term Suspensions Following Adoption of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines

Dewey G. Cornell<sup>1</sup>, Anne Gregory<sup>2</sup>, and Xitao Fan<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**  
This quasi-experimental study examined the adoption of the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines in 23 high schools. After training, school administrators and other staff members demonstrated substantial increases in knowledge of threat assessment principles and decreased commitment to zero tolerance approaches. Schools using the guidelines showed a 52% reduction in long-term suspensions and a 79% reduction in bullying infractions from the pretraining year to the posttraining year, in contrast to a control group of 26 schools not using the guidelines.

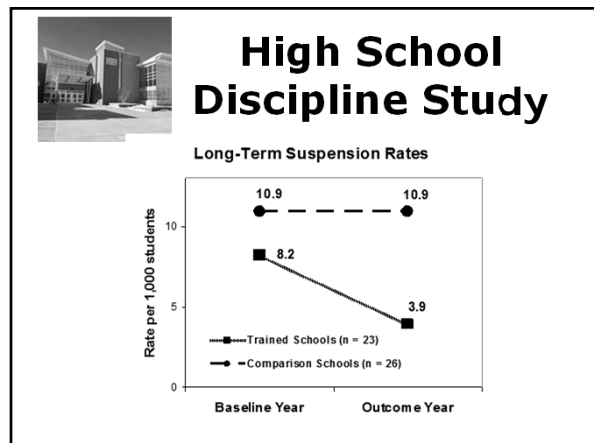




## High School Discipline Study

- Compared 23 high schools implementing threat assessment with 26 control high schools (no threat assessment).
- Used school records of suspensions and discipline infractions for baseline year prior to training and follow-up year after training.

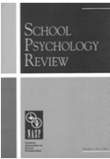
In press, *NASSP Bulletin*





## Randomized Controlled Trial

- 40 schools (K-12)
- Randomly assigned
- 1 year follow-up
- 201 students

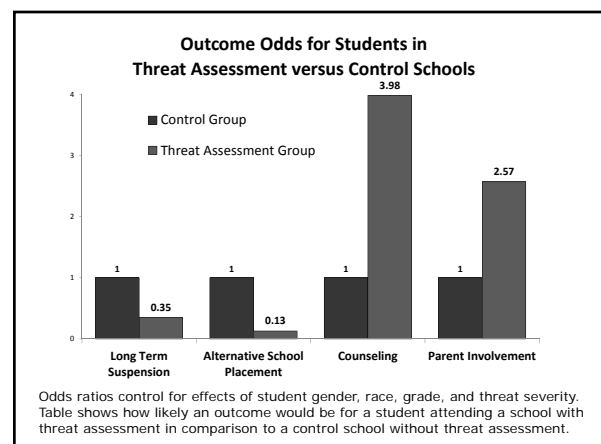


## Randomized Controlled Trial

**Students in threat assessment schools...**

- Received more counseling
- More parent involvement
- Fewer long-term suspensions
- Fewer alternative placements

Logistic regression odds ratios:  
3.98, 2.57, .35, and .13



## 2013 NREPP Listing

**NREPP** SAMHSA's National Registry of  
Evidence-based Programs and Practices

[Home](#) | [About NREPP](#) | [Find an Intervention](#) | [Reviews & Submissions](#) | [Learning Center](#) | [Contact Us](#)

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**Intervention Summary**    [Back to Results](#)    [Start New Search](#)

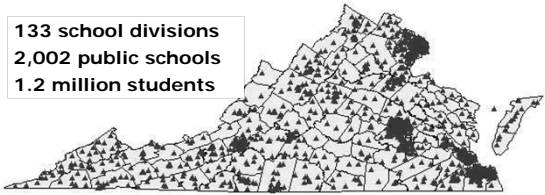
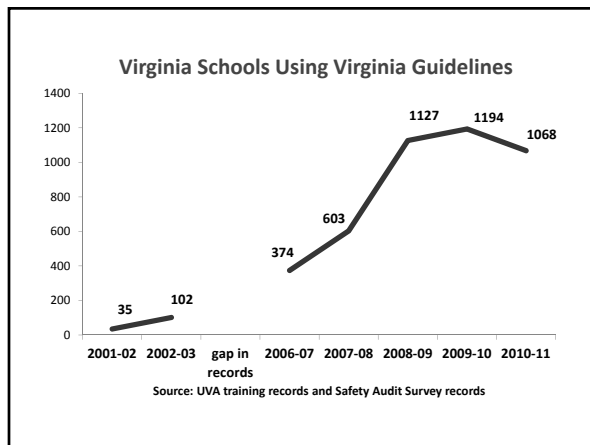
### Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines

The Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines (V-STAG) is a school-based manualized process designed to help school administrators, mental health staff, and law enforcement officers assess and respond to threat incidents involving students in kindergarten through 12th grade and prevent student violence. V-STAG is also designed to provide students involved in threat incidents with appropriate mental health counseling services, with parental involvement, and reduce the numbers of long-term school suspensions or expulsions and alternative school setting placements. V-STAG also aims to reduce in-school bullying infractions and provide a supportive school climate. The program requires each participating school to establish a threat assessment team, whose members resolve student threat incidents through the use of a context-sensitive, problem-solving approach instead of the more traditional, punitive approach of zero tolerance.

<http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=263>

## Virginia Public Schools

**133 school divisions**  
**2,002 public schools**  
**1.2 million students**

## Association of Threat Assessment with Suspensions

Exp(B)	LTS	STS
Used Virginia Threat Assessment Guidelines	19% fewer	8% fewer

## Years Using TA Associated with Suspensions

### Schools using Virginia TA

Exp(B)	LTS	STS
One year increase in number of years using UVA TA (1-5)	17% fewer	5% fewer

$p < .05$  for both LTS and STS  
Same control variables

## Training Workshops

California
Colorado
Delaware
Florida
Georgia
Indiana
Kansas
Maryland
Ohio
South Carolina
Tennessee
Vermont
Washington
Wisconsin



