Authoritative School Discipline is Linked to Safer Schools and Higher Achievement:
Results from the Virginia High School Safety Study:

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Authoritative School Discipline

The disconnect between youth violence and school safety practices: 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

Virginia High School Safety Study

How the study was designed and conducted
The identification of authoritative schools
  1. Effects on bullying
  2. Effects on teacher victimization
  3. Suspension practices and dropout rates
  4. Threat assessment
Authoritative school practices

The Virginia High School Safety Study

How are school safety practices in Virginia's public high schools related to student outcomes?
- Student safety conditions
- Student discipline infractions
- Academic achievement

Dewey G. Cornell, Ph.D., is a forensic clinical psychologist and Professor of Education in the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. Dr. Cornell is Director of the UVA Youth Violence Project and a faculty associate of the Institute of Law, Psychiatry, and Public Policy.

Dr. Cornell has studied youth violence for over 20 years and has assisted numerous schools in the development of violence prevention programs. He has authored more than 100 publications in psychology and education, including two recent books: Guidelines for Responding to Student Threats of Violence and School Violence: Fears versus Facts.

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

"If you're going to take it off, you're going to take it off. You're not saying out loud, yes."

Virginia High School Safety Study
Virginia High School Safety Study

Conducted by a research team at the Curry School of Education (Cornell, Gregory, Fan, & Sheras)

In collaboration with:
- Virginia Department of Education
- Department of Criminal Justice Services and Center for School Safety

Funded by U.S. Dept. of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Data Sources
- Surveys of 9th grade students and teachers
- School discipline records
- School safety audit data
- SOL results
- Dropout data

How was the survey carried out?
Written and video instructions for:
- Principals
- Teachers
- Students

Adrianna Sgarlata, Miss Virginia 2006

Virginia High School Safety Study

Who participated in the study?
296 of 314 schools (94%)
1. 7,431 ninth grade students
2. 2,353 ninth grade teachers

Conceptual model for study
Two strategies underlie school safety efforts:
1. Structure – school discipline and order
2. Student support – efforts to support and engage students

Four Parenting Styles

Structure
Hi   Lo
Authoritative   Permissive
Authoritarian   Negligent

Support
Hi   Lo
Authoritative   Permissive
Authoritarian   Negligent

Derived from parenting research by psychologist Diana Baumrind
Virginia High School Safety Study

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

Virginia High School Safety Study

4 groups of schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hi</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lo</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Virginia High School Safety Study

How are structure and support related to student bullying and victimization?
### Bullying Climate Scale

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

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

### Victimization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>False</th>
<th>True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Damage to personal property worth more than $10.</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft of personal property worth more than $10.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was physically attacked and had to see a doctor</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was physically attacked, but not serious enough to see a doctor.</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received obscene remarks or gestures from a student.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was threatened in remarks by a student.</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a weapon pulled on me.</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

104 authoritative schools (high structure and high support) had bullying at the 27th percentile

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.

Teacher Victimization

This year have any of the following happened to you personally in the school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>% of Teachers (N=1,870)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had a weapon pulled on me.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was physically attacked and had to see a doctor.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was physically attacked, but not seriously enough to see a doctor.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to personal property worth more than $10.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft of personal property worth more than $10.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was threatened in remarks by a student.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received obscene remarks or gestures from a student.</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was spoken to in a rude or disrespectful manner by a student.</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Victimization

What school characteristics are linked to lower levels of teacher victimization?

After controlling for:
- School size
- Student poverty %
- Minority students %
- Urbanicity

Lower victimization in schools with:
- Higher structure
- Higher support

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.
Suspension Practices

Suspension may be 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

Schools vary widely in the use of suspension.

After controlling for:

- Student poverty %
- Minority students %
- Urbanicity
- Per pupil expenditure
- Student aggressive attitudes
- Student belief in school rules

High suspension schools had higher dropout rates.

Schools with higher suspension rates have higher dropout rates.

Threat assessment is an authoritative approach to violence prevention that considers the meaning and context of student behavior. Rules are strictly enforced, but punishment is based on the seriousness of the offense. Threat assessment is an alternative to zero tolerance that mandates the same punishment for all infractions.
**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

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**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*

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**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*
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

High School Discipline Study

Long-Term Suspension Rates

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

Authoritative Schools

Schools using authoritative practices of structure and support have:
1. Less bullying
2. Less teacher victimization
3. Lower suspension rates
4. Lower dropout rates
Authoritative Schools
Student perceptions of Disciplinary Structure

Thinking about your school over the last 6 months, would you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following...

1. Everyone knows the school rules for student conduct.
2. The school rules are fair.
3. The punishment for breaking school rules is the same no matter who you are.
4. The school rules are strictly enforced.
5. If a school rule is broken, students know what kind of punishment will follow.
6. We have a strict dress code at school.
7. If a student breaks the rules at this school, he or she will be punished.

Authoritative Schools
Student perceptions of a supportive climate

How much do you agree that adults in this school...

1. Really care about all students.
2. Acknowledge and pay attention to students.
3. Want all students to do their best.
4. Listen to what students have to say.
5. Believe that every student can be a success.
6. Treat all students fairly.
7. Support and treat students with respect.
8. Feel a responsibility to improve the school.

Authoritative School Practices

1. Firm but fair discipline, not zero tolerance
2. Less frequent use of suspension
3. Students feel that teachers and staff respect them and have concern for their success
4. Bullying prevention efforts
5. Threat assessment approach

http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu