How safe are U.S. schools? How can we prevent violence in schools?

Dewey Cornell, Ph.D.
Curry School of Education
University of Virginia

434-924-8929
Email: dcornell@virginia.edu
Website: youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu

Overview
1. U.S. schools are safer than it seems.
2. The fear of school violence is costly.
3. We need more emphasis on prevention.
4. There are many effective strategies for keeping schools safe.
5. Threat assessment can help prevent violence and reduce suspensions.

School shootings are so traumatic that they skew perceptions of school safety and convince the public and policymakers that there are dramatic needs for security measures.

http://everytownresearch.org/school-shootings/

USA First in Guns Per Capita


Selected countries. Note that some countries have a higher death rate than the U.S. – Jamaica, Honduras, El Salvador, Switzerland, Brazil, South Africa, Colombia, Mexico, Panama. Data from United Nations Homicide Statistics.
How safe are U.S. schools?

Annual Gun Toll
- 32,000 deaths
- 84,000 injuries
116,000 total

318 Shootings per day

Shootings deaths from: National Vital Statistics
http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/dataRestriction_inj.html

http://everytownresearch.org/school-shootings/

The U.S. is flooded with gun violence.

Floods spread everywhere.

2.5 yrs x 116,000 = 290,000 outside of schools

A school flood would not panic community leaders into believing that schools are dangerous places. We do not sandbag our schools or stock them with life preservers.
Homicide Locations

- **FBI NIBRS** (National Incident-Based Reporting System)
- 18,873 homicide incidents
- 2005-2010
- 1/3 U.S. population

2005-2010 Homicides in 37 States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>9647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street</td>
<td>4455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking lot/garage</td>
<td>1209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant/bar</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store/gas station</td>
<td>492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public building/business</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel/motel</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Restaurants have 10x more shootings than schools.

22 18 12 14 12 10 9 10 8 7 5 4 9 9 4 2 5 2 4 1 2 4

School violence has declined.

![Graph showing decline in school violence](graph.png)

Serious violent crime rate in U.S. schools

Indicators of school crime and safety; 2015. Table 2.1. National Crime Victimization Study data reported by National Center for Education Statistics (Zhang et al., 2016)

The Fear of School Violence Is Costly.

1. School Security Spending
2. School Suspensions

Building Security Measures

Bullet-Proof Building Entrances

Dewey Cornell
dcornell@virginia.edu
How safe are U.S. schools?

Building Security Measures

Metal detectors and x-ray screening

Security and Police Officers

School Shooter Drills Are Widely Practiced


(DeAngelis, Brent, & Ianni, 2011)

School security measures are expensive and deprive schools of resources that could be allocated to preventive measures such as anti-bullying programs and counseling services.

Extra security in Hillsborough schools would cost $4 million

School security measures could cost millions locally

Additional Florida School Security Could Cost $100 Million

School security wish list would cost Marion County $160M
Armed guards in every Minn. school would cost $138 million
NRA proposal would cost state schools about $138 million.

(DeAngelis, Brent, & Ianni, 2011)
How safe are U.S. schools?

ISPA 2016

July 21, 2016

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

Zero Tolerance Suspensions After the Newtown Shootings

6 year old pointed finger and said "pow!"

http://www.sott.net/article/255552-6-year-old-suspended-for-pretend-gunshot

Texas Study of School Discipline

Tracked school and court records
1 million 7th grade students for six years
60% suspended, placed, or expelled
(54% in-school, 31% out-of-school suspension, 15% placed in alt program)


Texas Study of School Discipline

Disciplinary Violations
83% Black males
74% Hispanic males
59% White males
Only 3% were mandated suspensions (no race differences)


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

We Need More Emphasis on Prevention

1. Prevention is not crisis response.
2. Prevention does not require prediction.
3. School Suspensions
**Prevention means “to keep something from happening”**

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

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

> Shootings seem unpredictable, but prevention does not require prediction.

**Prevention does not require prediction.**

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

**Prevention can reduce risk factors.**

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

---

Dewey Cornell
dcornell@virginia.edu
Prevention to stop deterioration.

We can intervene to resolve crisis situations before they deteriorate into violence.

Intensive, tertiary, or tier 3 prevention

3 Levels of Prevention

At-Risk Students
Students with some problem behaviors

Intensive Interventions
Students with very serious behavior problems

Schoolwide Prevention
All students

Many effective school-based programs

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

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

Threat assessment can help prevent violence and reduce school suspension.

FBI Recommendations on School Violence

“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 p1)
How safe are U.S. schools?

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.

Team roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal or Assistant Principal</th>
<th>Leads team, disciplinary decisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Resource Officer</td>
<td>Advises team, responds to illegal actions and emergencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Staff (School counselors, psychologists, social workers)</td>
<td>Team member to conduct mental health assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not ordinarily on team Teachers, aides, other staff</td>
<td>Report threats, provide input to team. No additional workload.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

Available from Amazon.com

Download at:
www.secretservice.gov
How safe are U.S. schools?

ISPA 2016

July 21, 2016

Dewey Cornell
dcornell@virginia.edu

Research on Threat Assessment


Very Serious Substantive Threats

Step 1. Evaluate Threat.
Step 2. Decide if threat is clearly transient or substantive.
Step 3. Respond to transient threat.
Step 4. Decide if substantive threat is serious or very serious.
Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.
Step 7. Follow up on action plan.

Governor’s School and Campus Safety Task Force

40 members,
Led by Secretaries of Public Safety, Education, and Health and Human Resources
http://dcsjs.virginia.gov/vcss/SchoolCampusSafetyTaskForce/

2013 NREPP Listing

Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines

The Virginia student threat assessment guidelines are a school safety intervention process designed to help school administrators, mental health staff, and law enforcement officers assess and respond to threat incidents involving students at the elementary school, middle and high school levels. The process was designed to assist students in threat incidents, including mental health counseling services, with integrated interventions, and reduce the number of long-term school suspensions and placements and alternative school settings placements. The Virginia student threat assessment program was developed by a group of experts, including a task force of 40 members, 40 members, and the Governor’s School and Campus Safety Task Force.

Student Threat Assessment as a Safe and Supportive Prevention Strategy

4-year project (2015-2018)

The project supported by grant 2014-DN-BX-0004 awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

How safe are U.S. schools?

ISPA 2016

July 21, 2016

Dewey Cornell
dcornell@virginia.edu
How safe are U.S. schools?

**ISPA 2016**

**Dewey Cornell**
dcornell@virginia.edu

---

**Threat Outcomes (%)**

- Threat Not Attempted: 97.7%
- Attempted and Averted: 2.6%
- Threat Carried Out: 0.7%

---

**Disciplinary Outcome (%)**

- Reprimand: 53%
- Suspension out of school: 44%
- Suspension in school: 16%
- Expulsion reduced to...: 5%
- Detention after school: 3%
- Placed in juvenile detention: 3%
- Arrested: 1%
- Expelled: 1%

Percentages for 1,865 threat cases from 785 schools. One case can involve more than one outcome.

---

**School Placement Outcome (%)**

- No Change: 84%
- Transferred to alternative school: 8%
- Homebound instruction: 5%
- Transferred to regular school: 1%
- Other: 2%

---

**Disciplinary Outcomes**

- White
- Black
- Hispanic

No statistically significant differences for White vs Black or White vs Hispanic students

---

**Virginia Student Threat Assessment Project**

- Schools are making differentiated assessments, recognizing that most cases are not serious.
- Few threats are carried out.
- Most students are able to return to school, with few arrests or expulsions.
- Similar outcomes for Black, Hispanic, and White students.

---

[http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu](http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu)