Secrets of School Safety

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. Many secrets are hidden in plain sight.
2. We may already know the secrets, but school policymakers and the public are blind to them.
3. We must be active advocates of school safety who share our secrets.

Secrets

1. Our schools are safer than we think.
2. Violence can be prevented.
3. Bullying is not as rampant as we are told.
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.
The alarming number of school shootings since 2012 killings in Newtown

Debate over how many school shootings actually occurred

Correct Number Of Mass School Shootings Since Sandy Hook: ZERO

But 232,000 outside of schools

Biggest Secret about School Safety?

Our Schools Are Safe!
Homicides At School vs Outside of School
Ages 5-18

Sources: CDC National Center for Health Statistics and School Associated Violent Death Surveillance Study. Annual totals are approximate. Using the school year for school homicides and calendar year for non-school data.

2005-2010 Homicides in 37 States

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“Any given school can expect to experience a student homicide about once every 6,000 years.”

125,000 schools ÷21 deaths/year

School violence has declined.

Indicators of school crime and safety; 2013. Table 2.1. National Crime Victimization Study data reported by National Center for Education Statistics (Robers et al., 2014)


Why the Fear of School Violence Matters

1. School Suspensions
2. School Fortification
3. Active Shooter Drills

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
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

Another Secret about School Safety

School suspension doesn’t work.

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

Texas Study of School Discipline

Tracked school and court records
1 million 7th grade students for six years
60% suspended or expelled


3.3 Million Suspensions Per Year Fuel the School to Prison Pipeline

Secrets of School Safety
NASP 2015 Annual Convention
Feb 20, 2015

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434-924-8929
Building Security Measures

Bullet-Proof Building Entrances

Metal detectors and x-ray screening

Security and Police Officers

Camera Monitoring Systems
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.

School shooter drills are widely practiced. Students are involved in shooter drills. Students escorted from school during a shooter drill. Simulated injuries.
Students taught to prepare for intruders.

Many states mandate 1 or more lockdown drills per year.

Another Secret about School Safety

Little evidence that school security measures are effective.

Police officers in schools can have both positive and negative effects. When police enforce school discipline, student misbehavior is criminalized.

Overall, studies conclude that there is little evidence that security measures reduce school crime.

Critics say, "Security is necessary because we can’t predict who will be violent, and therefore prevention is not possible."

House Education and Labor Committee Hearing on Campus Safety

May 15, 2007
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.

Another Secret about School Safety

Prevention does not require prediction. Our limited ability to predict individual acts of violence does not mean we cannot prevent violence.

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.
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3 Levels of Prevention

- Intensive Interventions
  - Resources: counseling, and supervision
  - Program: counseling
- At-Risk Students
  - Students with severe problem behaviors
- Schoolwide Prevention
  - All students

Another Secret about School Safety

Bullying is serious, but its prevalence has been exaggerated.

Little Agreement Across Studies

National Prevalence of Being Bullied at School

- Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS, 2013)
- National Crime Victimization Survey (2011)
- National Household Survey (Finkelhor, 2014)
- Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (Molcho, 2009)
- Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (Wang, 2009)

Reasons for Disagreement

- Definitions of bullying
- Survey methods
- Sampling strategies
- Age groups
- Time periods

Why are rates so high?

- Surveys don’t limit bullying to repeated incidents with a power imbalance.
- Students don’t use the definitions.

43 Self-Reported Victims of Bullying

In a middle school of 482 students, 8% reported bullying victimization 1 or more times per week. Counselors interviewed the students and confirmed only half as victims of bullying. Cornell & Mehta (2011). Professional School Counseling.
Who is being bullied?
Help us stop bullying at this school.

Bullying is defined as the use of one's strength or popularity to injure, threaten, or embarrass another person. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social. Physical bullying is when a student hits, kicks, grabs, or shoves you on purpose. Verbal bullying is when a student teases or taunts you in a hurtful way. Social bullying is when a student tries to keep others from being your friend or from letting you join in what they are doing. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength argue or fight.

Based on this definition of bullying, write the names of any students who are the victims of bullying. You may write the name of any student at your school whom you know has been bullied at school during the past month.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Counselors used a common standard for interviewing students and determining whether they were victims of bullying.

Follow-up Interviews
1. Victim of bullying
2. Former victim
3. Peer conflict
4. Joke nomination
5. Unknown

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCeV3qJL7IU
Cases start at 10:11
How many victims of bullying were still being bullied 4 weeks later?

59% reduction in bullying (from 104 to 43)
Studies show wide range of effects
Some studies found negative effects
Most studies show positive effects

Although bullying is a serious problem, we need to focus on confirming victims rather than rely anonymous self-report.

Interventions may be too narrowly focused on bullying rather than other forms of peer conflict.

Another Secret about School Safety

There are abundant effective practices to improve student behavior.

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

Numerous Effective Programs

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

Routine practice programs much less effective than demonstration programs (ES .10 vs .25)
Need to study routine school practices.
How should schools respond when a student threatens violence?

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 p 1)

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.

Download at: www.secretservice.gov

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.
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Threat Reported to Principal

Step 1. Evaluate Threat.

Step 2. Decide if threat is clearly transient or substantive.

Step 3. Respond to transient threat.

Step 4. Decide if the substantive threat is serious or very serious.

Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.


Step 7. Follow up on action plan.

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 the substantive threat is serious or very serious.

Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.


Step 7. Follow up on action plan.

Transient 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 the substantive threat is serious or very serious.

Step 5. Respond to serious substantive threat.


Step 7. Follow up on action plan.

Research on Threat Assessment

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

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

Dewey Cornell
434-924-8929
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

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

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.

NASSP Bulletin, 2011

Randomized Controlled Trial

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

Students in threat assessment schools...
- Received more counseling
- More parent involvement
- Fewer long-term suspensions
- Fewer alternative placements

Logistic regression odds ratios: 3.96, 2.57, .35, and .13

2013 NREPP Listing

Virginia Public Schools

133 school divisions
2,002 public schools
1.2 million students

Association of Threat Assessment with Suspensions

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<th>Exp(B)</th>
<th>LTS</th>
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<td>Used Virginia Threat Assessment Guidelines</td>
<td>19% fewer</td>
<td>8% fewer</td>
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Years Using TA Associated with Suspensions

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<td>One year increase in number of years using UVA TA (1-5)</td>
<td>17% fewer</td>
<td>5% fewer</td>
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\( p < .05 \) for both LTS and STS
Same control variables

Research Needs

- More controlled studies comparing schools with and without threat assessment.
- Research on threat context and student characteristics.
- More follow-up studies of threat outcomes.
- Identification of effective threat prevention efforts (e.g., bullying reduction).

Governor’s School and Campus Safety Task Force

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

- Statewide implementation data
- Inventory of practices and models
- Fidelity standards
- Assessment of outcomes
- Technical assistance/training
- RCT on training effectiveness

Spread the secrets.