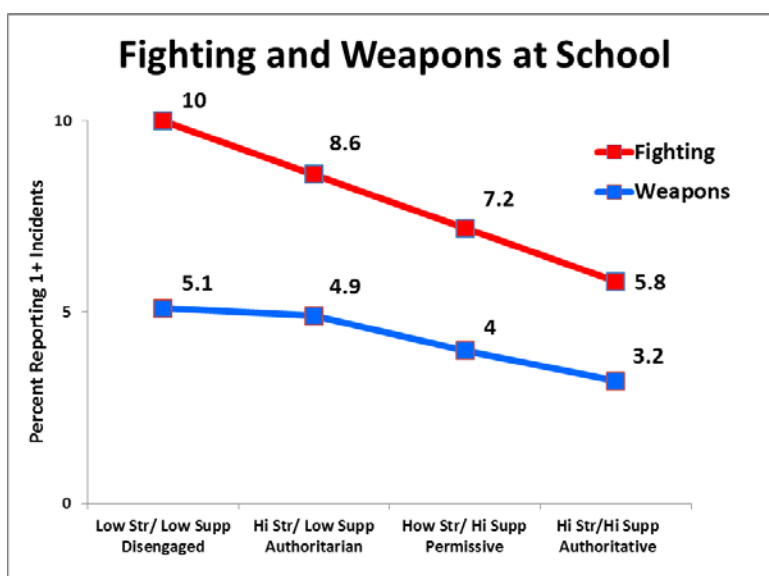


Authoritative High Schools have Less Fighting and Weapon Carrying at School

Our research found that students in high schools with an authoritative climate report lower rates of fighting and weapon carrying than students in other schools. As described in Issue 1, an authoritative school is one in which students report that their teachers are strict but fair in their discipline (high structure) *and* concerned and respectful toward them (high support). In contrast, there are schools with high structure but low support (authoritarian), high support but low structure (permissive), or low structure and low support (disengaged). School climate was measured with surveys of 48,027 students in grades 9-12 in 323 Virginia public schools. Students were asked about fighting in the past 12 months and weapon carrying in the past 30 days at school using the same questions used on the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey. As shown in the chart, fighting averaged 5.8% and weapon carrying averaged 3.2% in authoritative schools, versus 10% and 5.1% respectively in disengaged schools. The comparisons of school types controlled for differences in size, poverty level, and minority composition of the student enrollment as well as differences in student race, gender, GPA, and parent education.



Practical Suggestions. Educators do not have to choose between being strict versus being supportive with their students; the best strategy is to strive for both. A policy of automatic suspension out of school is unlikely to be effective, since many studies find that suspension is associated with an increase in misbehavior and a decline in academic performance even though it is intended to have the opposite effect. Disciplinary consequences that keep the student in school are less likely to have negative side-effects. A more promising approach is to investigate the reasons for the student's behavior and help the student resolve the underlying problem or conflict and take responsibility for his or her actions. When possible, educators should intervene proactively when they see evidence of conflict and anger that could result in a fight. Information on restorative school discipline is available here: <http://www.otlcampaign.org/restorative-practices> <<http://www.weareteachers.com/blogs/post/2015/04/03/restorative-justice-a-different-approach-to-discipline>>

Study Overview. The Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey (including scales from the Authoritative School Climate Survey) was administered as a component of the Virginia School Safety Audit program carried out by the Virginia Center for School Safety of the Department of Criminal Justice Services, in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Education. The survey was designed to yield practical information on school climate and safety conditions that can be used to improve conditions for learning. The survey was developed by researchers (P.I. Dewey Cornell) at the Virginia Youth Violence Project of the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia. This project was supported by Grant #2012-JF-FX-0062 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice. This is a correlational study that can support, but not prove, causal relationships. More detailed analyses are available from the Virginia Youth Violence Project: <<http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu>>.