The 2009 Virginia School Safety Survey Results

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I. Executive Summary

Legislation enacted in 2005 transferred the responsibility for school safety audits from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). The Virginia Center for School Safety (VCSS) was given authority to prescribe the safety audit content and reporting process. In an effort to better understand the audit process, the VCSS, with technical assistance from the Criminal Justice Research Center, conducted a study to review the status of school safety audit data in Virginia in 2003. The results of the review were published in August 2004, and are available at: www.dcjs.virginia.gov/cple/documents/schoolsafetyAuditReport.pdf. Legislation that relates to the VCSS and School Safety Audit may be found in Appendix A.

As part of its continuing work toward revising the audit process, the VCSS and Criminal Justice Research Center develop and conduct an on-line school safety survey which allows schools and school divisions to meet their Code mandate to annually report safety audit data to the VCSS. The first Virginia School Safety Survey was conducted in 2005 and subsequent surveys were conducted in 2006, 2007, and 2008. These reports can be found on the DCJS website at http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/vcss/audit/index.cfm.

The 2009 survey collected information that describes school safety policies, practices, and conditions in Virginia public schools during the 2008-2009 school years. The survey was conducted in August and September 2009 and covered school safety-related topics such as: school demographic information; assessment, planning, and communication; and school security/surveillance.

Major Findings from the 2008-2009 Survey:

- All of the 2,006 public *schools* operating in Virginia in school year 2008-2009 completed the survey by the publication date of this report. This represents a 100% response rate.

- The majority of schools, 69% (suburban, *exurban* and rural) were located outside of an urban area.

- Seventy-eight percent (78%, 1,555) of schools routinely received notification from local law enforcement of certain offenses committed by students. There has been a 44% increase in schools receiving these notifications since the 2006-2007 school year.

- Twenty-percent (20%, 394) of schools reported that they activated some portion of their Crisis Management Plan (CMP)/Emergency Management Plan (EMP) due to an actual emergency (not including weather-related activations). Of 394 schools reporting activation of their CMP/EMP, the majority of the activations were related to incidents occurring off school grounds and incidents unrelated to the school

- Eighty-five percent (85%, 1,706) of schools had an automated *electronic notification system* that notifies parents/guardians when there is an emergency at the school. This represents an increase of 261% over the last four years.

- Eighty-three percent (83%, 555) of 669 schools that surveyed their students listed bullying as one of the top student safety concerns. Eighty-four (84%) of schools that conducted a student survey in 2007-2008 also reported bullying as a top student safety concern.

- Seventy-eight percent (78%, 1,571) of schools had a process that they used to respond to student threats of violence. Of those that used a formal threat assessment process, 72%, or 1,127 schools, used the guidelines developed by the University of Virginia.

- There were 547 schools that reported that they used a formal threat assessment process to assess actual threats in their schools. Of these, 30% (163 schools) reported that they assessed at least one threat that was later determined to be viable or substantive.

- The number of schools using a *controlled access system* has steadily increased over the past three years with 26% in 2006-07, 40% in 2007-08, and 46% in 2008-09.

- Eighty-seven percent (87%, 1,735) of schools indicated that, other than the main entrance, all exterior entrances to their building/campus were locked during school hours as compared to 78% in 2006-07 and 81% in 2007-08.

- Forty six percent (46%, 921) of schools checked visitors' names (including parents and guardians) against the sex offender registry bulletins. This represents an increase over the 2007-08 school year when 37% of schools checked visitors names against the registry and 29% in 2006-07.

- Thirty-six percent (36%, 712) of schools had some type of safety or security personnel present at all times during the school day. Of these, 79% (559 schools) report having a School Resource Officer (SRO) on duty at all times and 47% (334 schools) report having

a School Security Officer (SSO) on duty at all times. Of 559 schools that reported having a SRO present at all times during the school day, 57% (316) indicated that their SRO is fully funded by a law enforcement agency. Twenty-five percent (25%, 140) of schools said the position is funded with a combination of school division and law enforcement funds. Eight percent (8%) or 42 schools indicated that they fully fund the school resource officer position.

- Nine percent (9%, 182) of schools reported having gang-related problems or incidents during the 2008-2009 school year. This represents a decrease in number of schools reporting any gang related problems or incidents from previous years (2006-07, 13%, and 2007-08, 13%).

II. Introduction

Since 1997, the Virginia General Assembly has required all public schools to conduct school safety audits (§ 22.1 – 279.8). All relevant code sections pertaining to school safety audits can be found in Appendix A. The purpose of the audit is to assess the safety conditions of schools, identify and develop solutions for physical safety concerns, including building security issues, and identify and evaluate patterns of student safety concerns. Responses and solutions based on the audit include recommendations for structural adjustments, changes in school safety procedures, and revisions to the school division's student code of conduct.

Although the VDOE developed the original safety audit process, legislation governing the audit was modified and the result transferred the development, standardization, and analysis of the items to be reviewed to the VCSS at the DCJS in 2005.

The first automated Virginia School Safety Survey was conducted by the VCSS in 2005 using data gathered

from the 2004-2005 school year. In 2007, the VCSS partnered with the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education to conduct the Virginia High School Safety Study. This study, conducted as part of Virginia's School Safety Audit program, was mandated by Virginia Codes § 22.1-279.8 and § 9.1-184 to identify and evaluate patterns of school safety concerns. A report on overall study findings and practice implications was disseminated to all high schools by the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education. This report may be found online at http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu/pdf/vhss-ninth-grade-survey-report-7-13-08.pdf. Appendix C and E in this report contain information about the study.

The survey process is continually updated to ensure both its effectiveness and relevance. As a result, some topics are identified as requiring further examination and changes are made for the following year. Such reviews and changes will continue to be made to this survey each year, while continuity of some questions will be maintained to allow for trend analyses.

III. Survey Methodology

In August 2009 all Virginia school division superintendents were contacted and directed to the Virginia Safety Survey Website. They were instructed to inform each of their division's school principals about the website and survey requirements. The website provided information about the survey and support for superintendents and principals, including survey instructions, a list of terms and definitions, frequently-asked questions, a preview list of survey questions, and a link to the survey. Additionally, superintendents were asked to update their contact information and to review and update a list

of their division's schools. Superintendents could also view the completed surveys submitted by their division's schools and make changes they deemed appropriate.

The web-based Virginia School Safety Survey was developed and administered for the VCSS by the DCJS Research Center. School principals or their designees completed the web-based school survey and provided information that reflected conditions during the 2008-2009 school year. The surveys were conducted during August and September of 2009.

IV. Survey of Virginia Schools

The Virginia School Safety Survey asked about safety-related policies and practices in individual schools. The survey addressed topics such as: school identification and demographic information; assessment, planning, and communication; and school security and surveillance.

Of the 2,006 public schools (as defined by DCJS for purposes of this survey) operating in Virginia in school year 2008-2009, 100% completed the survey by the publication date of this report. The 2,006 responding schools represent all of Virginia's 132 school divisions, as well as Virginia's Academic-Year Governor's Schools, Regional Alternative Education Programs, Regional Career and Technical Programs, Regional Special

Education Programs, schools within the Department of Correctional Education and the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind.
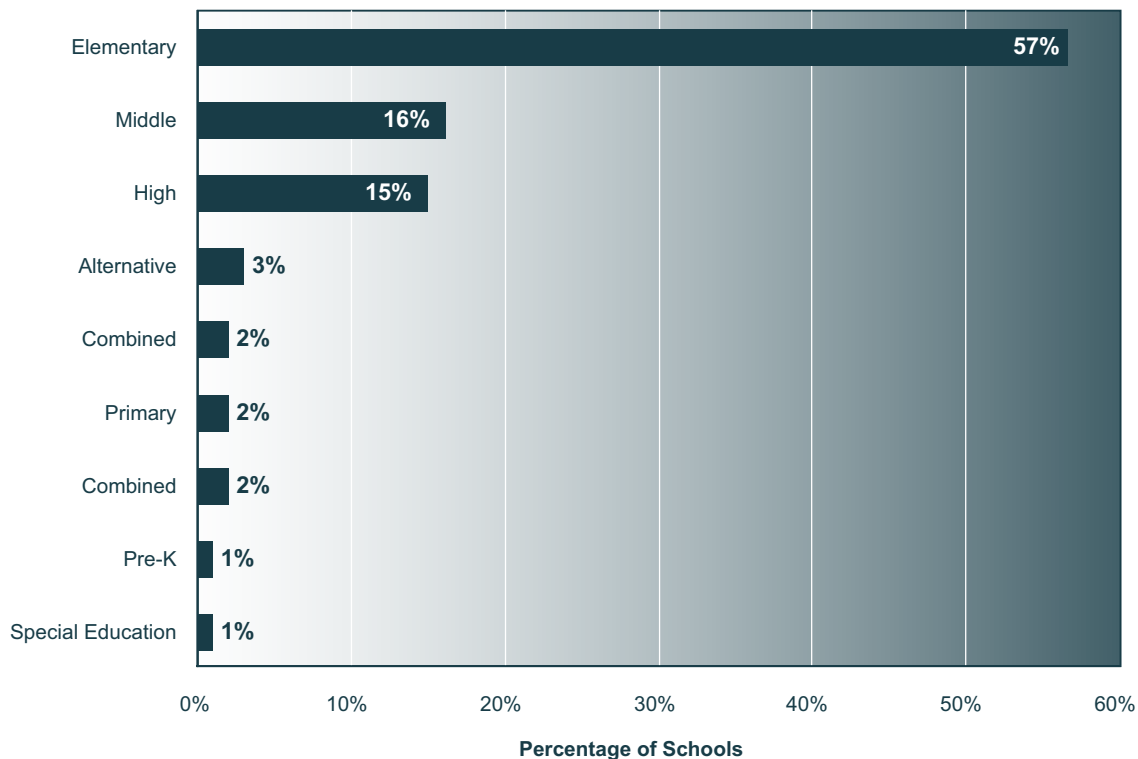
This section of the report discusses the school survey findings. The information is organized by the following categories: school identification and demographic information; assessment, planning, and communication; and school security and surveillance. The schools' responses to the survey questions are summarized in text, tables, and charts. A copy of the survey instrument can be found in Appendix B of this report. Appendix D contains definitions for words that are *italicized* in this report.

SCHOOL IDENTIFICATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. **Which of the following best describes your *school?***

    As shown in Chart 1, elementary schools made up 57% (1,137) of all Virginia public schools. Middle and high schools made up 16% (327) and 15% (304), respectively. The total number of schools in Virginia's public school divisions for the 2008 – 2009 school year was 2,006.

CHART 1: Type of Public Schools in Virginia

School Type	Percentage
Elementary	57%
Middle	16%
High	15%
Alternative	3%
Combined	2%
Primary	2%
Combined	2%
Pre-K	1%
Special Education	1%

Percentage of Schools

Other types of Virginia public schools reported less frequently included: Governor's, Magnet, Department of Correctional Education, Charter, Adult Education and Deaf and Blind.

2. What was your *fall enrollment* on September 30, 2008?

Table 1 displays the range of student enrollment numbers in Virginia's public schools. Eighty-seven percent (87%, 1,699) of the schools had 1,000 or fewer students enrolled in their school at the start of the 2008-2009 school year. Seventy- three percent (73%, 1,436) of the schools had between 251 and 1,000 students.

TABLE 1 Range of Enrollment, by Number of Schools			
Enrollment Range	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools	Cumulative Percent
0 – 50	31	2%	2%
51-250	232	12%	14%
251-500	631	32%	46%
501-1000	805	41%	87%
1001-1500	145	7%	94%
1501-2000	76	4%	98%
2001-2500	17	1%	99%
2501-3000	9	1%	100%
3001+	2	<1%	100%

School enrollment size was also examined in relationship to the type of school. Generally, elementary schools had smaller enrollments, and enrollment size increased with grade levels.

| TABLE 2 Range of Enrollment, by School Type					
Enrollment Range	Elementary	Middle	High	Other	Total
0 – 50	<1%	0	1%	21%	2%
51 – 250	12%	4%	7%	53%	12%
251 – 500	41%	22%	19%	14%	32%
501 – 1,000	46%	54%	25%	11%	41%
1,001 – 1,500	1%	19%	20%	0	7%
1,501 – 2,000	0	1%	21%	0	4%
2,001 – 2,500	0	0	5%	1%	1%
2,501 – 3,000	0	0	3%	0	1%
3,001 – 5,000	0	0	1%	0	<1%
Total	100%	100%	102%	100%	100%

Totals may exceed 100% due to rounding

In this table, Combined, Charter, Magnet, Governor's, Primary and Career/Technical schools were categorized as Elementary, Middle, High or Other based on the grade levels included among their enrollment.

The Other school types include: Combined, Primary, Pre-K, Alternative, Career/Technical, Charter, Magnet, Governor's, Special Education, Correctional, Adult Education, and the Deaf and Blind school.

- Eighty-seven percent (87%) of elementary schools had enrollments between 251 – 1,000 students.
- Seventy-six percent (76%) of all middle schools had enrollments between 251 – 1,000 students.
- High schools were more likely to have larger populations with enrollments between 501-2,000 students in sixty-six percent (66%) of these schools.
- Specialty schools typically had smaller student populations with less than 250 students in 84% of alternative schools and 92% of special education schools.

CHART 2: Type of School Setting

Exurban, 2%

Other, 10%

Suburban, 36%

Urban, 21%

Rural, 31%
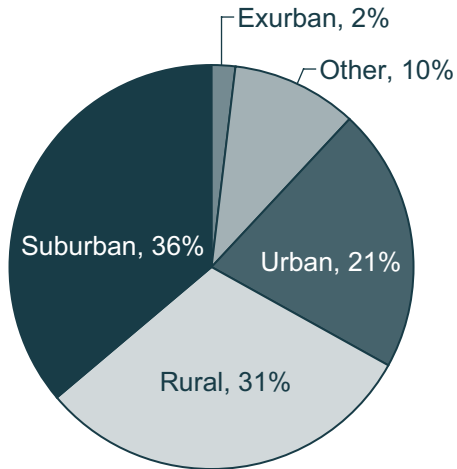
**3. Which setting best describes the area where your school is located?**

Chart 2 shows the percentage of schools that described being located in either an urban, suburban, *exurban,* rural, or other type of setting. The category "other" includes settings such as correctional facility, town, and a mix of types. A majority of schools, 69% (suburban, exurban and rural) were located outside of an urban area.

ASSESSMENT, PLANNING, AND COMMUNICATION

4. **Virginia Code § 22.1-279.3:1 requires local law enforcement to notify schools of certain offenses committed by students under certain circumstances. Does your school routinely receive such notification on these offenses committed by students from local law enforcement?**

Seventy-eight percent (78%, 1,555) of schools routinely received notification from local law enforcement of certain offenses committed by students. As illustrated in Chart 3, there has been a steady increase in schools receiving this information from law enforcement since the 2006-07 school year. Fifty-five percent (55%) of schools reported receiving this information in 2006-07 and 62% reported receiving this information in 2007-08. Overall, there has been a 44% increase in notifications since the 2006 – 2007 school year.

**CHART 3: Routine Notification by Law Enforcement
(for school years 2006-2007 through 2008-2009)**

55%

62%

78%

2006-2007   2007-2008   2008-2009

Percentage of Schools
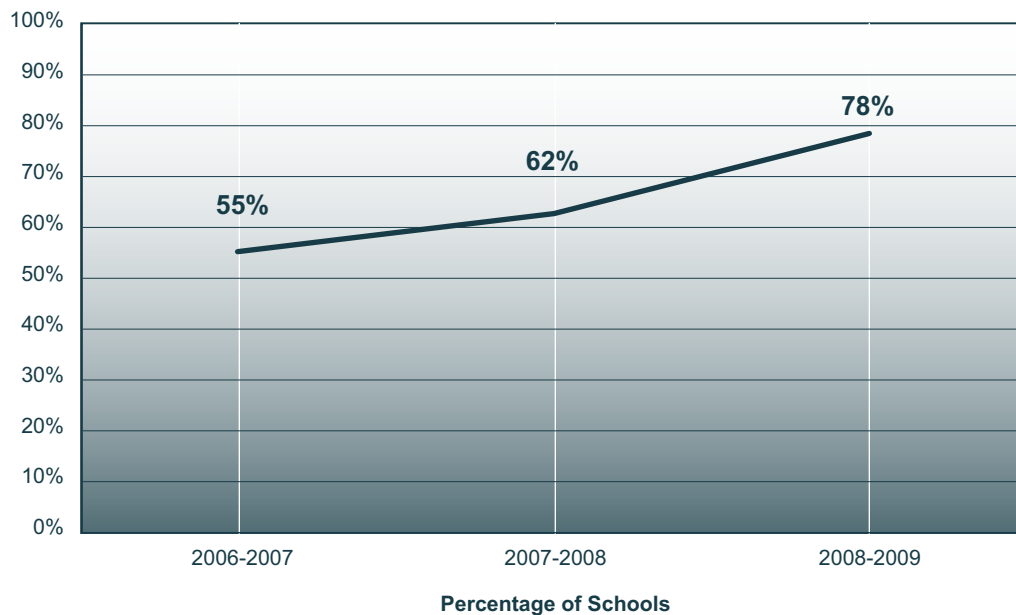
5. **Virginia Code § 22.1-279.8 describes school crisis and emergency management plans (CMP/EMP). It also states that "each school board shall ensure that every school that it supervises shall develop a written school crisis, emergency management, and medical response plan."**

    Did you have to activate any portion of your CMP/EMP during the 2008 – 2009 school year due to an actual *emergency* or crisis?

    If so, why did you activate your crisis plan? (not including weather-related incidents)?

    Twenty-percent (20%, 394 schools) of schools reported that they activated some portion of their CMP/EMP due to an actual emergency, not including weather related activations. This shows a slight decrease over previous years in non-weather related CMP/EMP activations. In 2006-2007, 23% of schools activated some portion of their CMP/EMP due to an actual emergency or crisis, and in 2007-2008, it was 22% of schools.

    Of the 394 schools reporting activation of their CMP/EMP, the majority of the activations were related to incidents occurring off school grounds and incidents unrelated to the school. As shown in Table 3, 25% of schools which activated their CMP/EMP did so for an incident occurring in the community, but not on school grounds. Nineteen percent did so for an incidence of crime or violence occurring off school grounds. Another 9% of schools reported activation of their plan due to an incident at another school which impacted their school in some way.

TABLE 3 Reasons for Activating CMP/EMP	
Reason for Activation	**Percent of Schools**
Community incident that impacted school	25%
Student or staff accident or death on or off campus	20%
Incidence of violence/crime occurring off school property	19%
Power outage/utility malfunction	11%
Incident at another school which impacted your school	9%
Bomb threat	9%
Fire	7%
Suspicious person/intruder	7%
Incidence of violence/ crime occurring on school property	4%
Hazardous chemical incident	3%
Other	19%

6. **Does your school have an *electronic notification system* (ENS) for notifying parents/guardians of an emergency at your school?**

    If so, under what emergency circumstances did you activate your school's electronic notification system? (not including weather or schedule changes)

    Eighty-five percent (85%, 1,706) of schools had an automated electronic notification system that notified parents/guardians when there was an emergency at the school.

    As shown in Chart 4, there has been a steady increase in the number of schools using an electronic notification system (ENS) for notifying parents/guardians of an emergency at school since 2005-06. This represents an overall increase of 261% from the 2004-2005 school year to 2008-2009.

**CHART 4: Schools with Emergency Notification Systems
(for school years 2004-2005 through 2008-2009)**
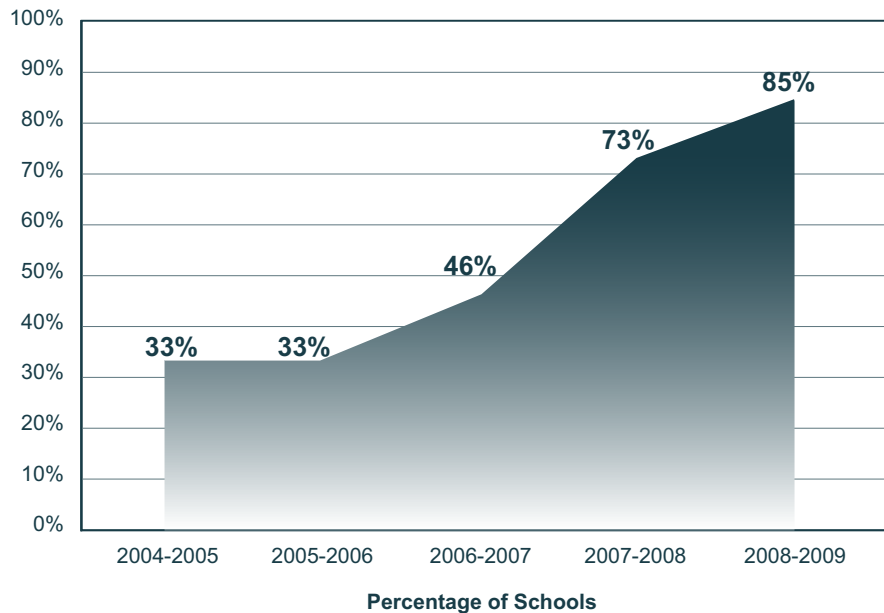

Percentage of Schools

Table 4 lists the wide variety of incidents that caused schools to activate their ENS. It should be noted that of the 1,706 schools that indicated that they have an ENS, 82% (1,396 schools), did not activate their ENS for any emergency circumstances.

TABLE 4 Emergency Circumstances that Required Use of ENS	
Reason for Activation	**Percent of Schools**
Community incident that impacted school	5%
Power outage/utility malfunction	4%
Student or staff accident or death on or off campus	3%
Update about ongoing critical incident/emergency situation	3%
Incidence of violence/crime occurring off school property	3%
Incident at another school which impacted your school	2%
Bomb threat	2%
Fire	1%
Incidence of violence / crime occurring on school property	1%
Suspicious person/Intruder	1%
Hazardous chemical incident	1%
Other	5%
We did not activate our ENS for any emergency circumstances	82%

7. **Did your school distribute an anonymous survey/questionnaire to students in the 2008 – 2009 school year to assess student school safety concerns?**

   If so, based on the survey /questionnaire responses, what three issues concerned students the most?

   There were 669 schools (33%) that reported distributing an anonymous survey to students in order to assess their school safety concerns.

Over the past four years, the percentage of schools surveying students regarding their school safety concerns has remained virtually unchanged. Schools surveying students ranged from 30% in the 2005-2006 school year to 33% in 2008-2009.

Bullying has remained one of the top student safety concerns of those schools conducting student surveys. This year, 83% of 669 schools that surveyed their students listed *bullying* as one of the top student safety concern. Eighty-four (84%) of schools that conducted a student survey in 2007-08 also reported bullying as a top student safety concern. Concern over weapons on campus was low with only 3% (17) of schools reporting this as a top student safety concern.

CHART 5: Issues That Most Concerned Students
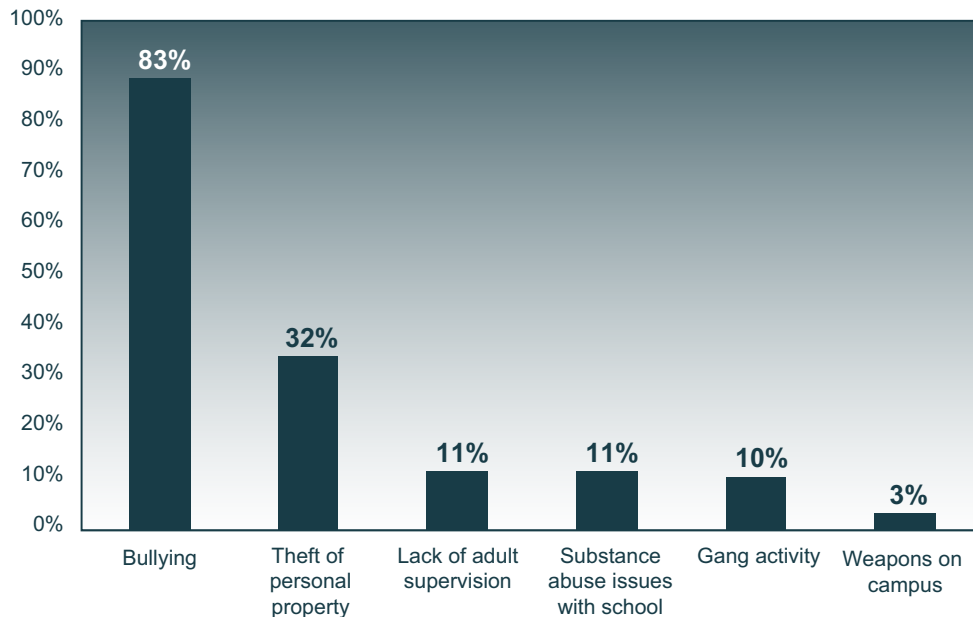
8. Does your school use a *formal threat assessment* process to respond to student threats of violence?

   If so, do you follow the guidelines developed by the University of Virginia (UVA)?

Seventy-eight percent (78%, 1,571) of all schools had a formal threat assessment process that they used to respond to student threats of violence. Of these, 72%, or 1,127 schools used the threat assessment guidelines developed by the University of Virginia.

In the 2006 – 2007 school year there were 374 schools that used the formal threat assessment guidelines developed by UVA. In 2007 – 2008 it was 603 schools, and in 2008 – 2009 it was 1,127 schools. This represents an overall increase of 201% in the number of schools using UVA's guidelines.

9. Were any threats assessed using this process during school year 2008 -- 2009?

   If so, were any of these threats determined to be viable or substantive?

In 2008-09, schools were asked if they used a formal threat assessment process to assess any threats. Of the 1,571 schools that used such a process, 35%, or 547 schools, reported actually assessing a threat with the process.

Of these 547 schools, 30% (163 schools) reported that they assessed a threat that was later determined to be viable or substantive.
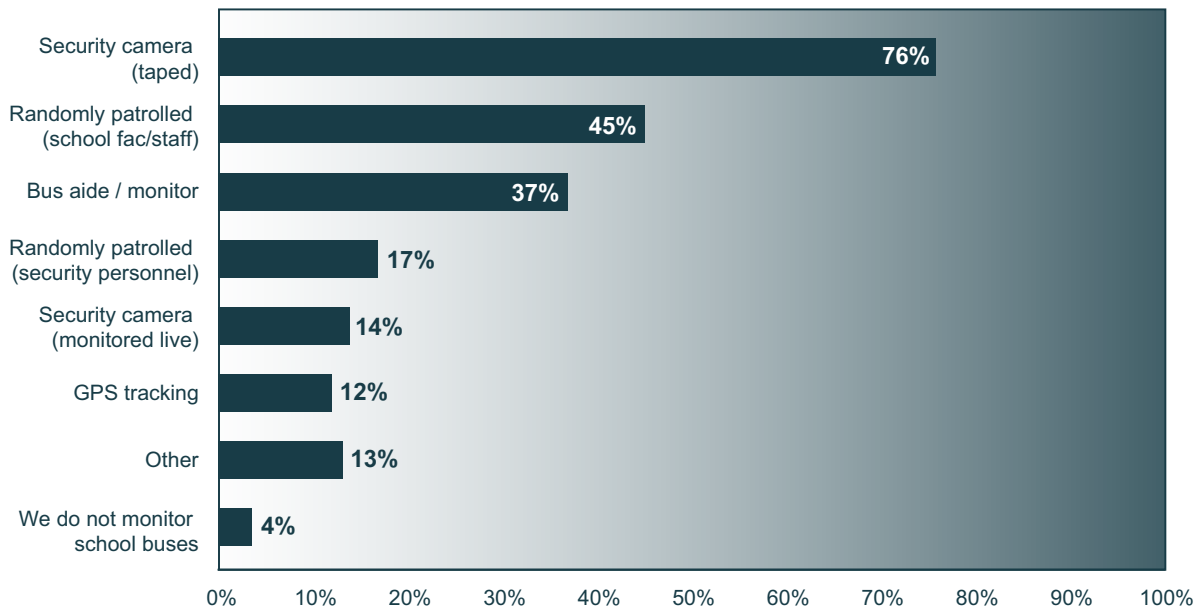
SCHOOL SECURITY/SURVEILLANCE

10. What methods does your school use to monitor schools buses and/or safety on school buses?

Schools were asked to indicate which methods they use to monitor schools buses and/or safety on school buses from a list of methods provided. Fourteen percent (14%, 274) of schools used security cameras to monitor school buses live in real time while 76% (1,525 schools) used security cameras which are taped but not monitored in real time. Twelve percent (12%, 238) of schools used GPS tracking systems to monitor school buses.

Chart 6 shows the percentage of schools that employed other methods of monitoring school buses. It should be noted that 4% (94 schools) said that they did not monitor school buses.

CHART 6: Methods of Bus Monitoring

| Method	Percentage
Security camera (taped)	76%
Randomly patrolled (school fac/staff)	45%
Bus aide / monitor	37%
Randomly patrolled (security personnel)	17%
Security camera (monitored live)	14%
GPS tracking	12%
Other	13%
We do not monitor school buses	4%

11. Is the main entrance to your school building/campus secured by a *controlled access system* during school hours?

Just under half of the schools (46%, 919 schools) indicated that the main entrance to their school building or campus was secured by a controlled access system during school hours.

As shown in Chart 7, the number of schools using a controlled access system has steadily increased over the past three years with 26% in 2006-07, 40% in 2007-08, and 46% in 2008-09.

**CHART 7: Schools with Controlled Access System
(for school years 2006-2007 through 2008-2009)**

School Year	Percentage
2006-2007	26%
2007-2008	40%
2008-2009	46%

Percentage of Schools
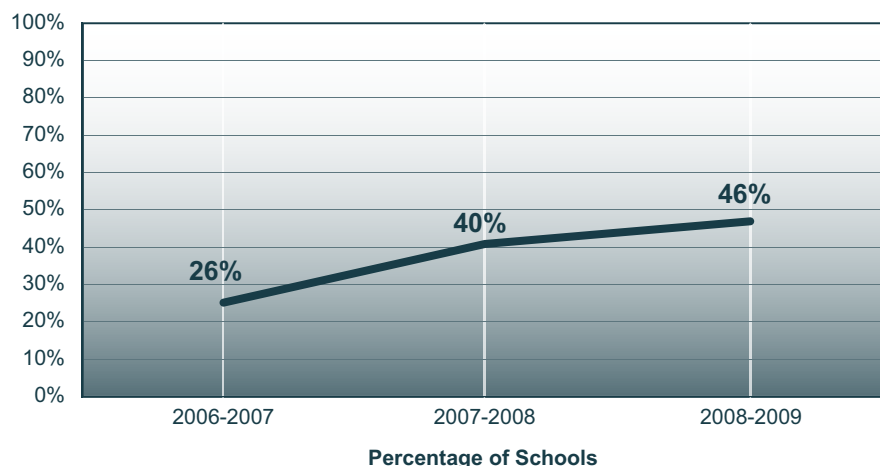
12. Other than the main entrance, are all exterior entrances to your school building/campus locked during school hours?

Eighty-seven percent (87%, 1,735) of schools indicated that all exterior entrances to their building/campus, other than the main entrance, were locked during school hours. This is an increase over recent years when 78% of schools in 2006-07 and 81% of schools in 2007-08 indicated the same.

13. Can all classrooms in your school be locked from both the inside and the outside of the classroom?

Forty-seven percent (47%, 939) of schools reported that they had the ability to lock all classrooms from both the inside and the outside. This is a slight increase over previous years with 41% of schools in 2006-07 and 45% in 2007-08.

14. Is someone stationed at the front entrance of your school at all times during school hours to ensure that visitors report to the main office/visitor check-in?

Slightly more than half of schools (52%, 1043) had someone at the front entrance at all times during school hours to require visitors report to the main office. This represents a slight increase over 2007-08 where 49% of schools reported having someone at the front entrance at all times during school hours.

15. In reference to visitor check-in, which of the following groups of visitors are required to show photo ID?

About half of the schools (51%, 1,018 schools) indicate that they required all four categories of school visitors to show photo identification. These categories are parent/guardians, friends/relatives of students/staff, volunteers, and commercial visitors.

As illustrated in Chart 8, 70% (1,397) of schools required photo identification for commercial visitors. Friends/relatives of students was the second highest category of visitors required to show photo identification at 69% or 1,374 schools.

CHART 8: Type of Visitors That Must Show Photo ID
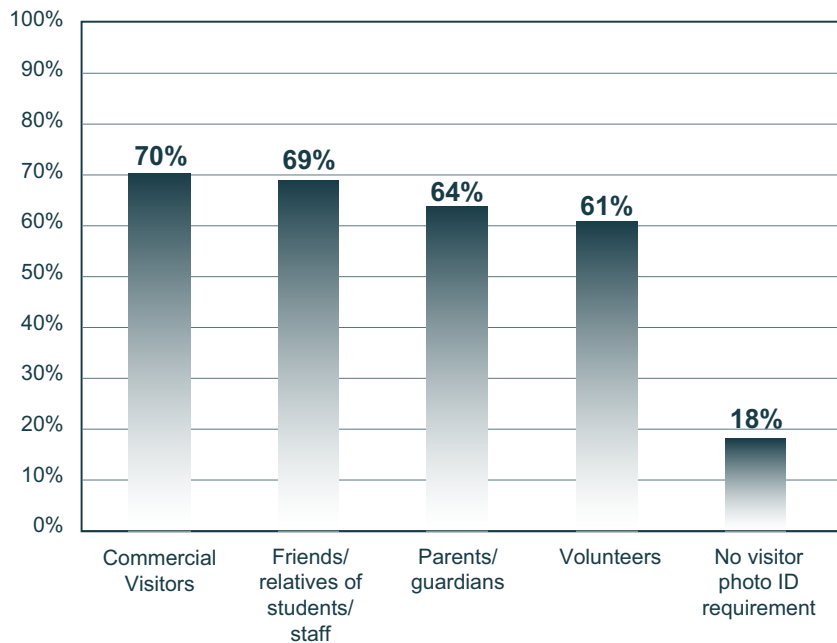
There were 360 schools (18%) that did not require visitors of any type to show photo identification.

TABLE 5			
Type of Schools That Do Not Require Photo ID for Any Visitors			
Type	Number of all schools	Number "no photo ID required for any visitors"	Percentage "no photo ID required for any visitors"
Elem	1177	176	15%
Middle	350	64	18%
High	316	109	26%
Other	54	11	20%
Total	2006	360	18%

16. **When checking in visitors, including parents/guardians, does office staff check names against the *sex offender registry* bulletins?**

Forty-six percent (46%, 921) of schools checked visitors' names against the sex offender registry bulletins. This represents an increase over the 2007-08 school year when 37% of schools checked visitors names against the registry and 29% in 2006-07.

17. **Which of the following statements accurately describes your school's use of background checks on all volunteers who work with students at your school (including both parent/guardian and non-parent/guardian)?**

    Background checks are conducted on all volunteers
    Background checks are NOT conducted on all volunteers
    Don't know, checks are conducted by the division office
    We don't have volunteer who work with students

If background checks are conducted, which of the following do you conduct on all volunteers who work with students at your school (including both parent/guardian and non- parent/guardian)?

CHART 9: Background Checks on School Volunteers

Schools were asked to indicate which statements most accurately described their use of background checks on all volunteers that work with their students. Thirty-seven percent (37%, 746) of schools do not conduct background checks on all volunteers. Only 36% (715) of schools require background checks on all volunteers. Twenty-one percent (21%, 415) of schools have no knowledge of whether or not background checks are conducted since this is done at the division level.

Of the 715 schools that required background checks of all volunteers, 92%, or 657 schools, check names against the sex offender registry. Fifty-eight percent (58%, 412) of schools conduct a criminal background check.
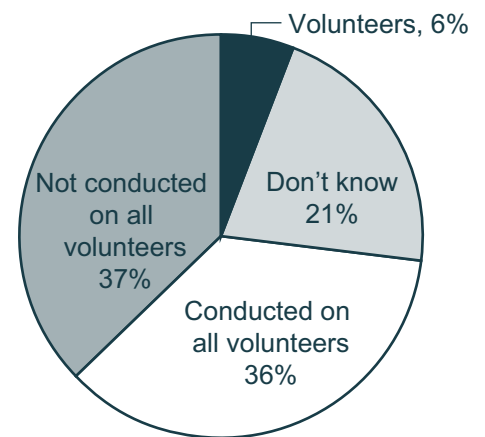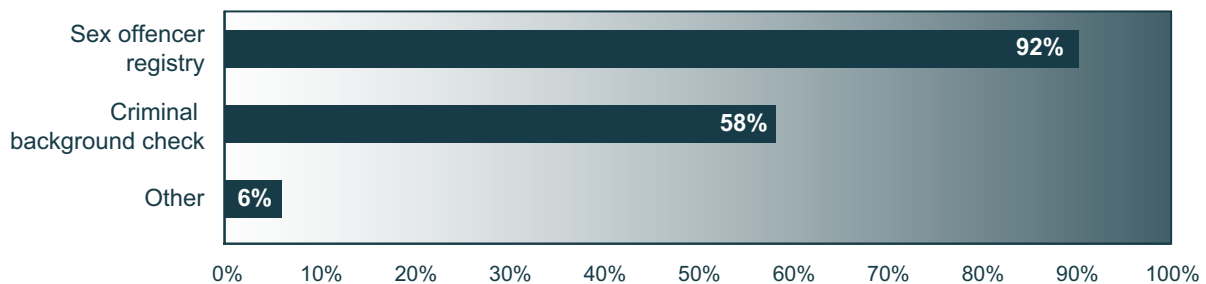
CHART 10: Types of Volunteer Background Checks

18. **Does your school have safety/security personnel present at your school at all times during the regular school day?**

    If so, what type(s) of safety/security personnel are present at your school at all times during the regular school day?

Thirty-six percent (36%, 712) of schools had some type of safety or security personnel present at all times during the school day. Although the type of security personnel has varied over the last four years, the percentage of schools providing security personnel at all times during the school days has remained somewhat consistent.

Table 6 Schools with Security Personnel Present At All Times During School Day	
School Year	**Percent of Schools**
2008-2009	36%
2007-2008	40%
2006-2007	36%
2005-2006	32%

Of the 712 schools that reported having safety/security personnel present at their school at all times during the regular school day, 79% (559) of schools reported having a school resource officer *(SRO)* on duty at all times and 47% (334) of schools reported having a *school security officer (SSO)* on duty at all times.

This indicates an increase in SROs among those schools that have safety/security personnel present all day. In the 2007-2008 school year, 70% (577 schools) had a School Resource Officer present at all times. The percentage of schools with SSOs has remained constant at 47% (371 schools).

19. **How are your SRO(s) funded?**

The 559 schools that reported having an SRO present at their schools throughout the school day were asked how their SROs were funded. SRO positions were primarily through the local law enforcement agencies.

Chart 11 shows that of 559 schools that reported having a SRO present at all times during the school day, 57% (316) indicated that their SRO was fully funded by a law enforcement agency. Twenty-five percent (25%, 140) of schools said the position was funded with a combination of school division and law enforcement funds. Eight percent (8%) or 42 schools indicated that they fully funded the school resource officer position(s).

CHART 11: How SROs are Funded
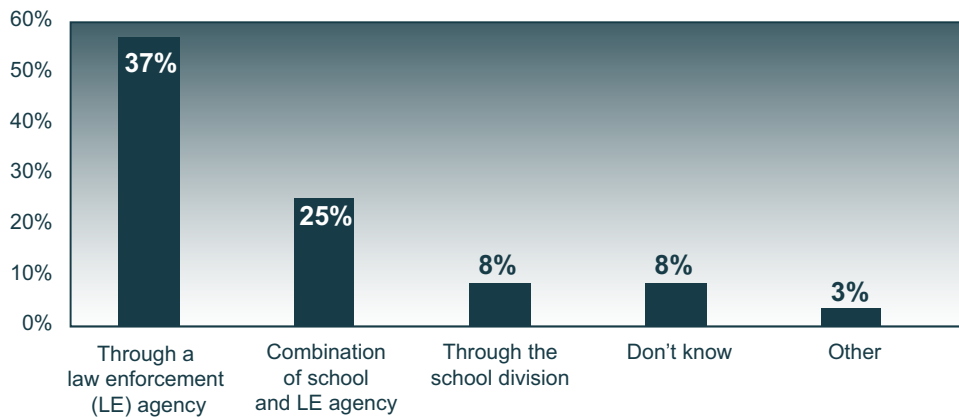
20. **Did your school have any gang-related[1] problems or incidents during the 2008 – 2009 school year?**

Nine percent (9%, 182) of schools reported gang-related problems or incidents during the 2008-2009 school year. Most schools (91%, 1,820) indicated that they had no gang-related problems/incidents. This represents a decrease in the number of schools reporting any gang-related problems or incidents from previous years (2006-07, 13%, and 2007-08, 13%).

21. **Did the number of gang-related problems or incidents increase, decrease, or stay about the same when compared with the previous school year?**

Chart 12 illustrates that, for most schools (87%, 1,681), the number of gang-related problems or incidents did not change.

The number of schools reporting gang-related problems and incidents has showed little change in the past 3 years. This year's survey shows a slight decrease in the number of schools reporting increased gang-related problems/incidents with 2% or 32 schools, compared to 4% of schools in 2006-07 and 3% in 2007-08.

CHART 12: Change in Gang-Related Problems or Incidents

Increased, 2%

Decreased 11%

Stayed the Same 87%
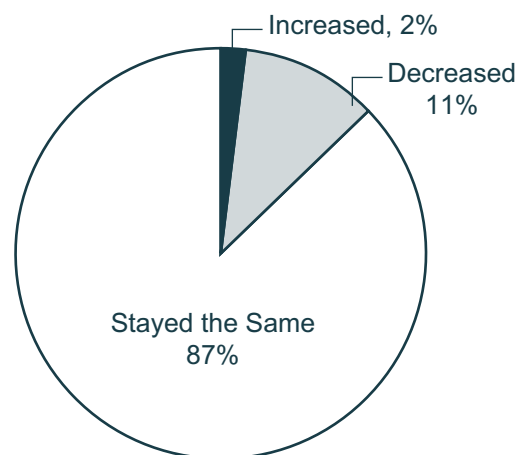
V. Acknowledgements

Pilot Test Participants

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[1] *Virginia Code definition: §18.2-46.1 Criminal street gang means "any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, (i) which has as one of its primary objectives or activities the commission of one or more criminal activities, (ii) which has an identifiable name or identifying sign or symbol, and (iii) whose members individually or collectively have engaged in the commission of, attempt to commit, conspiracy to commit, or solicitation of two or more predicate criminal acts, at least one of which is an act of violence, provided such acts were not part of a common act or transaction."*

Appendix A

Legislation Related to School Safety Audit

§ 22.1-279.8

§ 22.1-279.8. School safety audits and school crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plans required.

A. For the purposes of this section, unless the context requires otherwise:

"School crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plan" means the essential procedures, operations, and assignments required to prevent, manage, and respond to a critical event or emergency, including natural disasters involving fire, flood, tornadoes, or other severe weather; loss or disruption of power, water, communications or shelter; bus or other accidents; medical emergencies, including cardiac arrest and other life-threatening medical emergencies; student or staff member deaths; explosions; bomb threats; gun, knife or other weapons threats; spills or exposures to hazardous substances; the presence of unauthorized persons or trespassers; the loss, disappearance or kidnapping of a student; hostage situations; violence on school property or at school activities; incidents involving acts of terrorism; and other incidents posing a serious threat of harm to students, personnel, or facilities.

"School safety audit" means a written assessment of the safety conditions in each public school to (i) identify and, if necessary, develop solutions for physical safety concerns, including building security issues and (ii) identify and evaluate any patterns of student safety concerns occurring on school property or at school-sponsored events. Solutions and responses shall include recommendations for structural adjustments, changes in school safety procedures, and revisions to the school board's standards for student conduct.

B. The Virginia Center for School Safety shall develop a list of items to be reviewed and evaluated in the school safety audits required by this section. Such items shall include those incidents reported to school authorities pursuant to § 22.1-279.3:1.

The Virginia Center for School Safety shall prescribe a standardized report format for school safety audits, additional reporting criteria, and procedures for report submission, which may include instructions for electronic submission.

Each local school board shall require all schools under its supervisory control to annually conduct school safety audits as defined in this section and consistent with such list.

The results of such school safety audits shall be made public within 90 days of completion. The local school board shall retain authority to withhold or limit the release of any security plans and specific vulnerability assessment components as provided in subdivision 7 of § 2.2-3705.2. Each school shall maintain a copy of the school safety audit, which may exclude such security plans and vulnerability assessment components, within the office of the school principal and shall make a copy of such report available for review upon written request.

Each school shall submit a copy of its school safety audit to the relevant school division superintendent. The division superintendent shall collate and submit all such school safety audits, in the prescribed format and manner of submission, to the Virginia Center for School Safety.

C. The school board may establish a school safety audit committee to consist of representatives of parents, teachers, local law-enforcement agencies, judicial and public safety personnel, and the community at large. The school safety audit committee shall evaluate, in accordance with the directions of the local school board, the safety of each school and submit a plan for improving school safety at a public meeting of the local school board.

D. Each school board shall ensure that every school that it supervises shall develop a written school crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plan, consistent with the definition provided in this section. The Department of Education and the Virginia Center for School Safety shall provide technical assistance to the school divisions of the Commonwealth in the development of the school crisis, emergency

management, and medical emergency response plans that describe the components of a medical emergency response plan developed in coordination with local emergency medical services providers, the training of school personnel and students to respond to a life-threatening emergency, and the equipment required for this emergency response. The local school board shall annually review the written school crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plans. The local school board shall have the authority to withhold or limit the review of any security plans and specific vulnerability assessment components as provided in subdivision 7 of § 2.2-3705.2. The local school division superintendent shall certify this review in writing to the Virginia Center on School Safety no later than August 31 of each year.

Upon consultation with local school boards, division superintendents, the Virginia Center for School Safety, and the Coordinator of Emergency Management, the Board of Education shall develop, and may revise as it deems necessary, a model school crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plan for the purpose of assisting the public schools in Virginia in developing viable, effective crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plans. Such model shall set forth recommended effective procedures and means by which parents can contact the relevant school or school division regarding the location and safety of their school children and by which school officials may contact parents, with parental approval, during a critical event or emergency.

§ 9.1-184

§ 9.1-184. Virginia Center for School Safety created; duties.

A. From such funds as may be appropriated, the Virginia Center for School Safety (the "Center") is hereby established within the Department. The Center shall:

1. Provide training for Virginia public school personnel in school safety and the effective identification of students who may be at risk for violent behavior and in need of special services or assistance;

2. Serve as a resource and referral center for Virginia school divisions by conducting research, sponsoring workshops, and providing information regarding current school safety concerns, such as conflict management and peer mediation, school facility design and technology, current state and federal statutory and regulatory school safety requirements, and legal and constitutional issues regarding school safety and individual rights;

3. Maintain and disseminate information to local school divisions on effective school safety initiatives in Virginia and across the nation;

4. Collect, analyze, and disseminate various Virginia school safety data, including school safety audit

information submitted to it pursuant to § 22.1-279.8, collected by the Department;

5. Encourage the development of partnerships between the public and private sectors to promote school safety in Virginia;

6. Provide technical assistance to Virginia school divisions in the development and implementation of initiatives promoting school safety;

7. Develop a memorandum of understanding between the Commissioner of the Department of Criminal Justice Services and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to ensure collaboration and coordination of roles and responsibilities in areas of mutual concern, such as school safety audits and crime prevention; and

8. Provide training for and certification of school security officers, as defined in § 9.1-101 and consistent with § 9.1-110.

B. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall cooperate with the Center and, upon request, assist the Center in the performance of its duties and responsibilities.

§ 22.1-279.3:1

§ 22.1-279.3:1. Reports of certain acts to school authorities.

A. Reports shall be made to the division superintendent and to the principal or his designee on all incidents involving (i) the assault or assault and battery, without bodily injury, of any person on a school bus, on school property, or at a school-sponsored activity; (ii) the assault and battery that results in bodily injury, sexual assault, death, shooting, stabbing, cutting, or wounding of any person, or stalking of any person as described in § 18.2-60.3, on a school bus, on school property, or at a school-sponsored activity; (iii) any conduct involving alcohol, marijuana, a controlled substance, imitation controlled substance, or an anabolic steroid on a school bus, on school property, or at a school-sponsored activity, including the theft or attempted theft of student prescription medications; (iv) any threats against school personnel while on a school bus, on school property or at a school-sponsored activity; (v) the illegal carrying of a firearm, as defined in § 22.1-277.07, onto school property; (vi) any illegal conduct involving firebombs, explosive materials or devices, or hoax explosive devices, as defined in § 18.2-85, or explosive or incendiary devices, as defined in § 18.2-433.1, or chemical bombs, as described in § 18.2-87.1, on a school bus, on school property, or at a school-sponsored activity; (vii) any threats or false threats to bomb, as described in § 18.2-83, made against school personnel or involving school property or school buses; or (viii) the arrest of any student for an incident occurring on a school bus, on school property, or at a school-sponsored activity, including the charge therefor.

B. Notwithstanding the provisions of Article 12 (§ 16.1-299 et seq.) of Chapter 11 of Title 16.1, local law-enforcement authorities shall report, and the principal or his designee and the division superintendent shall receive such reports, on offenses, wherever committed, by students enrolled at the school if the offense would be a felony if committed by an adult or would be a violation of the Drug Control Act (§ 54.1-3400 et seq.) and occurred on a school bus, on school property, or at a school-sponsored activity, or would be an adult misdemeanor involving any incidents described in clauses (i) through (viii) of subsection A, and whether the student is released to the custody of his parent or, if 18 years of age or more, is released on bond. Further, any school superintendent who receives notification that a juvenile has committed an act that would be a crime if committed by an adult pursuant to subsection G of § 16.1-260 shall report such information to the principal of the school in which the juvenile is enrolled.

C. The principal or his designee shall submit a report of all incidents required to be reported pursuant to this section to the superintendent of the school division. The division superintendent shall annually report all such incidents to the Department of Education for the purpose of recording the frequency of such incidents on forms that shall be provided by the Department and shall make such information available to the public.

In submitting reports of such incidents, principals and division superintendents shall accurately indicate any offenses, arrests, or charges as recorded by law-enforcement authorities and required to be reported by such authorities pursuant to subsection B.

A division superintendent who knowingly fails to comply or secure compliance with the reporting requirements of this subsection shall be subject to the sanctions authorized in § 22.1-65. A principal who knowingly fails to comply or secure compliance with the reporting requirements of this section shall be subject to sanctions prescribed by the local school board, which may include, but need not be limited to, demotion or dismissal.

The principal or his designee shall also notify the parent of any student involved in an incident required pursuant to this section to be reported, regardless of whether disciplinary action is taken against such student or the nature of the disciplinary action. Such notice shall relate to only the relevant student's involvement and shall not include information concerning other students.

Whenever any student commits any reportable incident as set forth in this section, such student shall be required to participate in such prevention and intervention activities as deemed appropriate by the superintendent or his designee. Prevention and intervention activities shall be identified in the local school division's drug and violence prevention plans developed pursuant to the federal Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Title IV—Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act).

D. Except as may otherwise be required by federal law, regulation, or jurisprudence, the principal shall

immediately report to the local law-enforcement agency any act enumerated in clauses (ii) through (vii) of subsection A that may constitute a criminal offense and may report to the local law-enforcement agency any incident described in clause (i) of subsection A.

Further, except as may be prohibited by federal law, regulation, or jurisprudence, the principal shall also immediately report any act enumerated in clauses (ii) through (v) of subsection A that may constitute a criminal offense to the parents of any minor student who is the specific object of such act. Further, the principal shall report that the incident has been reported to local law enforcement as required by law and that the parents may contact local law enforcement for further information, if they so desire.

E. A statement providing a procedure and the purpose for the requirements of this section shall be included in school board policies required by § 22.1-253.13:7.

The Board of Education shall promulgate regulations to implement this section, including, but not limited to, establishing reporting dates and report formats.

F. For the purposes of this section, "parent" or "parents" means any parent, guardian or other person having control or charge of a child.

G. This section shall not be construed to diminish the authority of the Board of Education or to diminish the Governor's authority to coordinate and provide policy direction on official communications between the Commonwealth and the United States government.

Appendix B

Copy of the 2008-2009 Virginia School Safety Survey

Welcome to the 2009 Virginia School Safety Survey

This is a secure, web-based survey conducted by the Virginia Center for School Safety. Submission of this survey fulfills the Virginia School Safety Audit requirement. (Virginia Code §22.1-279.8).

While answering the following survey questions, please base your responses on the conditions in your school during the 2008 – 2009 school year.

Should you have any questions or experience technical problems with the survey, contact Donna Michaelis at the Virginia Center for School Safety, 804-371-6506 or donna.michaelis@dcjs.virginia.gov.

Please answer the following questions about your school as accurately as possible.

I.   School Identification and Demographic Information

1. Select your school division.

   To ensure the appropriate school and school division are credited with this survey submission/compliance, please take a moment to access the school name/code look-up feature linked to the following two questions in order to identify your school's formal name and appropriate VA Department of Education (DOE)-assigned school code.

2. What is the formal name of your school?

3. What is your school's ID number?

   If we have any questions about your survey responses, we would like to be able to contact you. Please provide us with your contact information:

4. What is your name?

5. What is your title?

6. What is your phone number?

7. What is your email address?

8. Which of the following best describes your school?

❑ Elementary	❑ Middle	❑ High Combined Grades
❑ Primary	❑ Pre-Kindergarten	❑ Kindergarten
❑ Alternative	❑ Career/Technical/Vocational	❑ Charter
❑ Magnet	❑ Governor's	❑ Special Education
❑ Correctional Education	❑ Adult Education	❑ School for the Deaf and Blind
❑ Other		

9. What grades are taught at your school?

❑ Pre-Kindergarten	❑ Kindergarten	❑ 1st grade
❑ 2nd grade	❑ 3rd grade	❑ 4th grade
❑ 5th grade	❑ 6th grade	❑ 7th grade
❑ 8th grade	❑ 9th grade	❑ 10th grade
❑ 11th grade	❑ 12th grade	

10. What was your *fall membership enrollment number* on September 30, 2008?

11. Which setting best describes the area where your school is located?

❑ Urban   ❑ Suburban   ❑ Exurban
❑ Rural   ❑ Town   ❑ Combination / mix
❑ Correctional   ❑ Other

II.   ASSESSMENT, PLANNING, AND COMMUNICATION

12. *Virginia Code § 22.1-279.3:1 (Paragraph B)* requires local law enforcement to notify schools of certain offenses committed by students under certain circumstances. Does your school routinely receive such notification on these offenses from local law enforcement?

❑ Yes   ❑ No

Virginia Code §22.1-279.8 *describes school crisis and emergency management plans. It also states that "each school board shall ensure that every school that it supervises shall develop a written school crisis, emergency management, and medical response plan."*

13. Did you have to activate any portion of your CMP/EMP during the 2008–2009 school year due to an actual *emergency* or crisis? (Note: Do not include weather-related incidents)

❑ Yes   ❑ No

(If 13 = yes)

13a.   Why did you activate your crisis plan? (Note: Do not include weather-related incidents)

❑ Incidence of violence / crime occurring on school property
❑ Incidence of violence / crime occurring off school property
❑ Student or staff accident or death on or off campus
❑ Community incident that impacted school
❑ Incident at another school which impacted your school
❑ Hazardous chemical incident
❑ Bomb threat
❑ Power outage / utility malfunction
❑ Fire
❑ Other

14. Does your school have an electronic notification system for notifying parents/guardians of an emergency at your school?

❑ Yes   ❑ No

(If 14 = yes)

     14a.   (If yes) Under what emergency circumstances did you activate your school's electronic notification system? (ce of violence /crime occurring on school property
❑ Incidence of violence /crime occurring off school property
❑ Student or staff accident or death on or off campus
❑ Community incident that impacted school
❑ Incident at another school wNote: Do not include weather or schedule changes)
❑ Incidenhich impacted your school
❑ Update about ongoing critical incident or emergency situation
❑ Hazardous material incident
❑ Power outage / utility malfunction
❑ Suspicious person / intruder
❑ Other
❑ We did not activate our ENS for an emergency

15. Did your school distribute an anonymous survey/questionnaire to students in the 2008 – 2009 school year to assess student school safety concerns?

❑ Yes   ❑ No

(If 15 = yes)
    15a.   Based on the survey/questionnaire responses, what three issues concerned students most? (Select three)

        ❑ Bullying (i.e., teasing)
        ❑ Gang activity
        ❑ Lack of adult supervision
        ❑ Substance abuse issues within school
        ❑ Theft of personal property
        ❑ Weapons on campus
        ❑ Other

16. Does your school use a formal threat assessment process to respond to student threats of violence?

❑ Yes   ❑ No, we have no formal process

(If 16 = yes)
    16a.   For your formal threat assessment process, do you follow the guidelines developed by the University of Virginia (UVA)?

❑ Yes   ❑ No

(If 16 =yes)
    16b.   Were any threats assessed using this process during school year 2008 - 2009?

❑ Yes   ❑ No

(If 16b = yes)
        16b-1.   Were any of these threats determined to be viable or substantive?

❑ Yes   ❑ No

III.   SCHOOL SECURITY/SURVEILLANCE

The questions in this section of the survey ask about security practices at your school. Because the public release of such information might compromise safety and security plans, Virginia Codes §2.2-3705.2 and §22.1-279.8 allow such information to be protected from release under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Understand that DCJS Virginia Center for School Safety will report the information in this section in an aggregated format for all schools, but it will not release specific information from identified schools.

17. What methods does your school use to monitor school buses and/or safety on school buses?
    ❑ GPS Tracking System
    ❑ Randomly patrolled by school faculty/staff
    ❑ Randomly patrolled by security personnel (including SROs, SSOs, or private security)
    ❑ Security camera (monitored live in real time)
    ❑ Security camera (taped, not monitored in real time)
    ❑ Bus aide / monitor
    ❑ Other
    ❑ We do not monitor school buses

18. Is the main entrance to your school building/campus secured by a controlled access system during school hours?
    ❑ Yes   No

19. Other than the main entrance, are all exterior entrances to your school building/campus locked during school hours?

❑ Yes   ❑ No

20. Can all classrooms in your school be locked from both the inside and the outside of the classroom?

❑ Yes   ❑ No

21. Is someone stationed at the front entrance of your school at all times during school hours to ensure that visitors report to the main office/visitor check-in?

❑ Yes   ❑ No

22. In reference to visitor check-in, which of the following groups of visitors are required to show photo ID?
❑ Parents/guardians
❑ Friends/relatives of students or staff
❑ Volunteers
❑ Commercial visitors (e.g., delivery persons, trade workers such as plumbers)

23. When checking in visitors, including parents/guardians, does office staff check names against the sex offender registry bulletins?

❑ Yes   ❑ No

24. Which of the following best describes your use of background checks on volunteers who work with students (including both parent/guardian and non-parent/guardian)?
❑ Background checks are conducted on all volunteers (including both parent/guardian and non-parent/guardian)
❑ Background checks are NOT conducted on all volunteers (including both parent/guardian and non-parent/guardian)
❑ Don't know because background checks are conducted by division office
❑ We don't have volunteers who work with students

(If 24 = "Background checks are conducted on all volunteers")
24a.   Which of the following background checks do you conduct on all volunteers who work with students at your school (including both parent/guardian and non-parent/guardian)?

❑ Criminal background check   ❑ Sex offender registry   ❑ Other

25. Does your school have safety/security personnel present at your school at all times during the regular school day?

❑ Yes   ❑ No

(If 25 = yes)
25a.   What type(s) of safety/security personnel are present at your school at all times during the regular school day?
❑ School Resource Officers (SROs)   ❑ School Security Officers (SSOs)   ❑ Other

(If 25a = SRO)
25a-1. Please give us the name and email of your SRO(s).

The next two questions ask about who employs your school's SRO and who funds your school's SRO. "Employ" means which agency ultimately supervises your school's SRO, and "fund" means from which agency does the funding for the SRO position originate?

(If 25a = SRO)
25a-2.   Who employs your SRO(s)?
❑ City Police   ❑ County Police   ❑ County Sheriff's office

❏ Combination of the above   ❏ Don't know

(If 25a = SRO)
25a-3.   How are your SRO(s) funded?
❏ Through the school division   ❏ Through a law enforcement agency
❏ Combination of the above   ❏ Other
❏ Don't know

Virginia Code definition: §18.2-46.1 Criminal street gang means "any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, (i) which has as one of its primary objectives or activities the commission of one or more criminal activities, (ii) which has an identifiable name or identifying sign or symbol, and (iii) whose members individually or collectively have engaged in the commission of, attempt to commit, conspiracy to commit, or solicitation of two or more predicate criminal acts, at least one of which is an act of violence, provided such acts were not part of a common act or transaction."

26. Did your school have any gang-related problems or incidents during the 2008 – 2009 school year?
    ❏ Yes   ❏ No

27. Did the number of gang-related problems or incidents increase, decrease, or stay about the same when compared with the previous school year?
    ❏ Increased   ❏ Decreased   ❏ Stayed about the same

Appendix C

The Virginia High School Safety Study

Introduction to Appendix C

The Virginia school safety audit process in 2007 included a school climate survey of ninth grade students and teachers from nearly 300 high schools. The survey measured student and teacher perceptions of school rules and discipline, teacher-student relationships, student involvement in school activities and commitment to learning, and the extent of bullying and teasing at school. Ninth grade was selected for study primarily because it is the first year of high school and therefore permits longitudinal study of the ninth grade cohort as they proceed through grades 9-12. In addition, ninth grade students account for approximately 45% of the disciplinary infractions that take place in high schools.

The results of the 2007 ninth grade survey are published as The Virginia High School Safety Study. The study is conducted by researchers at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education and the 2007 study was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. An executive summary of the Virginia High School Safety Study findings can be found in this appendix as well as at this website: http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu/pdf/apa2008-school-safety-symposium-2-page-summary-8-14-08.pdf

Since 2008, UVA and DCJS have also distributed to middle and high school principals nine one page summaries on this study with practical findings. The series of findings has addressed:

1. Should Schools Be Strict or Be Supportive?

2. How Should Schools Respond to Student Threats of Violence?

3. How Much Teacher Victimization Occurs in Virginia High Schools?

4. How Can We Encourage Students to Seek Help to Prevent Violence?

5. How Does School Safety Influence SOL Achievement?

6. Why Do Suspension Rates Vary So Much from School to School?

7. How are Suspension Rates Related to Dropout Rates?

8. Can a Supportive School Climate Reduce Suspension Rates for Black and White Students?

9. Do Larger Schools Really Have More Student Bullying and Victimization?

These nine summaries are attached in this appendix and is also accessible by visiting the DCJS website at www.dcjs.virginia.gov/vcss/audit/index.cfm or UVA's Virginia Youth Violence Project at http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu.

In addition to the survey results and summaries, the study integrated data from the VDOE's 2006-2007 Annual Report on Discipline, Crime and Violence. The following map represents the rate of aggressive discipline violations per 100 students for attendance zones of 314 high schools in Virginia. Aggressive discipline violations were determined by summing all incidents of assault and sexual assault, bullying and hazing, fighting, gang activity, physical altercations, robbery and extortion, threatening, and possession of a real weapon. The complete Annual Report on Discipline, Crime and Violence is available to the public from the VDOE website at: www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Publications/Discipline/datacoll/06_annual_report.pdf

Aggressive Discipline Violations in Virginia High Schools

(per 100 students)

- 0 to 3 violations
- 4 to 6 violations
- 7 or more violations
- Missing Data
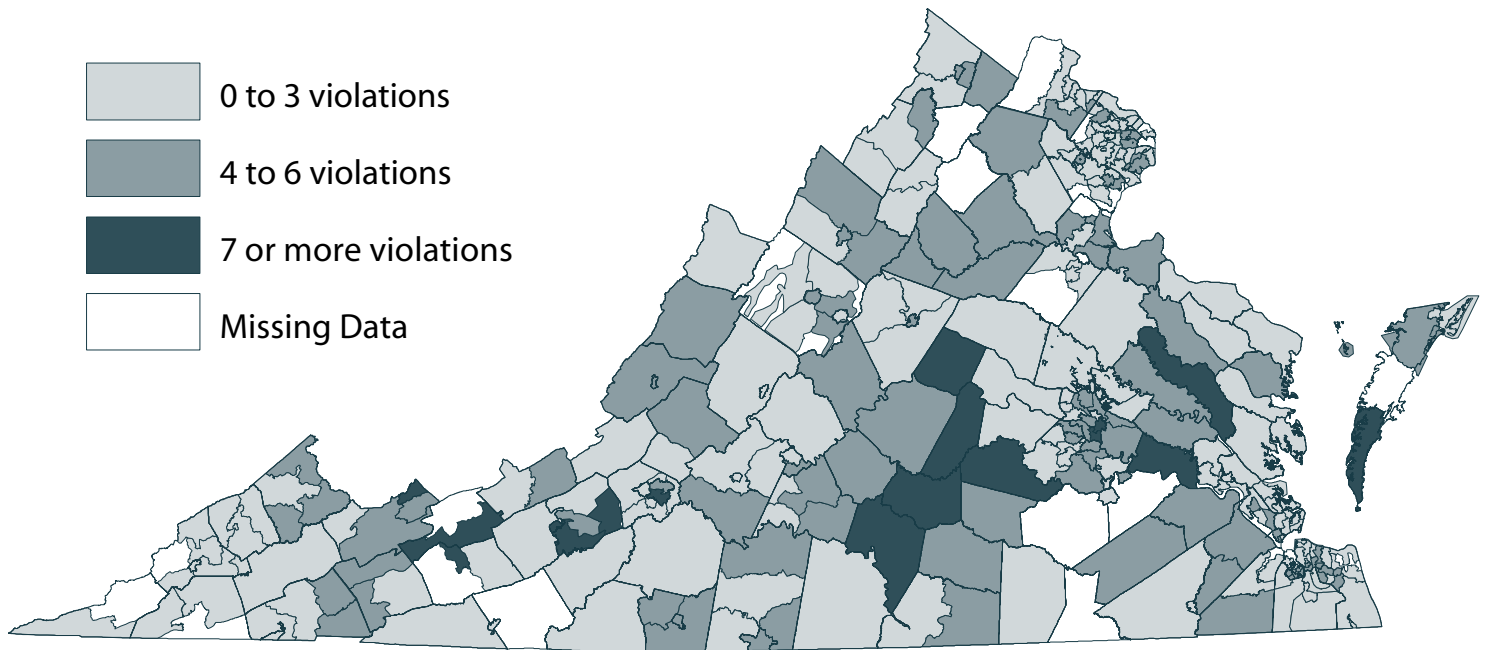
This map shows the attendance zones for 314 Virginia public high schools, colored to show the rate of aggressive discipline violations per 100 students.

Appendix D

Definitions

Bullying

Repeated negative behaviors intended to frighten or cause harm. This may include, but is not limited to, verbal or written threats or physical harm. Another form is cyber bullying, which is using information and communication technologies such as e-mail, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal Web sites, and defamatory online personal polling Web sites, to support deliberate, hostile behavior intended to harm others.

Controlled Access System

Controlled access entry systems provide a barrier between potential visitors and building interiors that must be actively removed by school personnel, such as one that requires a staff member to "buzz" visitors through a locked door.

Electronic Notification System

A telephone notification system that is tied to a school's student database and automatically calls every contact number listed for every student within a specific number of minutes. Is typically activated by a telephone call from a designated school employee or by an e-mail sent from a computer using a secure passcode.

Emergency

An emergency is any event or situation that forces school closure or schedule changes, or that directly threatens the safety or well-being of any students, faculty, staff, or members of the community and requires immediate action for resolution. Examples include severe weather, loss of utilities, bomb threats or terrorist acts, violent crime, release of hazardous materials, and others, and need not occur on school property.

Exurban

A region that lies outside a city, usually beyond its suburbs, primarily consisting of upper-middle class residential.

Fall Enrollment (Fall Membership Enrollment Number)

As defined by the Virginia Department of Education (DOE), this is the number of students enrolled in public school on September 30th of a given year. Each school in Virginia that officially enrolls students (i.e. student records are maintained on a Virginia Teacher's Register

or automated system) submits their fall membership enrollment number to DOE on an annual basis. Excluded from the September 30th count are: special education preschool pupils, pupils in hospitals, clinics or detention homes, and local programs such as vocational and alternative education centers (i.e., centers or schools which receive, but do not officially enroll students). More information about the fall membership enrollment number is available on the Virginia Department of Education's website at http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/dbpubs/Fall_Membership/2008/readme.htm.

Formal Threat Assessment Process

In a school setting, a threat assessment is conducted when a person (or persons) threatens to commit a violent act, or engages in behavior that suggests that they might act violently. This systematic assessment examines the nature of the threat and the circumstances surrounding the threat, in order to evaluate the seriousness of the threat and probability that the threat will be carried out.

More information about threat assessments is available from the Virginia Youth Violence Project's website, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia at http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu/threat-assessment/student-threat-assessment.html.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is the statute that provides access to government records (or portions thereof) except to the extent that such records are protected from disclosure by any of the exemptions included in the act. Security plans and specific assessment components of school safety audits may be excluded from FOIA as referenced in § 2.2-3705.2 and as provided in § 22.1-279.8.

Virginia Code § 2.2-3700. Short title; policy.

A. This chapter may be cited as "The Virginia Freedom of Information Act."

B. By enacting this chapter, the General Assembly ensures the people of the Commonwealth ready access to public records in the custody of a public body or its officers and employees, and free entry to meetings of public bodies wherein the business of the people is being conducted. The affairs of government are not intended to be conducted in an atmosphere of secrecy

since at all times the public is to be the beneficiary of any action taken at any level of government. Unless a public body or its officers or employees specifically elect to exercise an exemption provided by this chapter or any other statute, every meeting shall be open to the public and all public records shall be available for inspection and copying upon request. All public records and meetings shall be presumed open, unless an exemption is properly invoked.

The provisions of this chapter shall be liberally construed to promote an increased awareness by all persons of governmental activities and afford every opportunity to citizens to witness the operations of government. Any exemption from public access to records or meetings shall be narrowly construed and no record shall be withheld or meeting closed to the public unless specifically made exempt pursuant to this chapter or other specific provision of law. This chapter shall not be construed to discourage the free discussion by government officials or employees of public matters with the citizens of the Commonwealth.

All public bodies and their officers and employees shall make reasonable efforts to reach an agreement with a requester concerning the production of the records requested.

Any ordinance adopted by a local governing body that conflicts with the provisions of this chapter shall be void.

School

The Virginia Center for School Safety uses a different definition for a "school" than the Virginia Department of Education due to the nature of the school safety audit requirement. For the purposes of a "school safety audit" the VCSS uses the following definition:

"A school is any separate physical structure that houses and instructs public school students on a daily basis."

Therefore, regional, alternative, governor's schools, head start, preschool facilities, and others that are not physically part of another public school building, are required to complete a school safety survey, regardless of where the enrollment of its students is housed.

School Resource Officer (SRO)

A certified law-enforcement officer employed by the local law enforcement agency that provides law-enforcement and security services to a Virginia public school.

School Security Officer (SSO)

An individual who is employed by the local school board for the singular purpose of maintaining order and discipline, preventing crime, investigating violations of school board policies, and detaining students violating the law or school board policies on school property or at school-sponsored events and who is responsible solely for ensuring the safety, security, and welfare of all students, faculty, staff, and visitors in the assigned school.

Sex Offender Registry

The registry, including the Public Notification Database, is based on the Virginia General Assembly's decision to facilitate access to publicly-available information about persons convicted of specified violent and sexual offenses. Adult individuals found within the registry are included solely by virtue of their conviction record and applicable state law.

APPENDIX E
PRACTICAL FINDINGS FROM THE VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL SAFETY STUDY

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA
CURRY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Practical Findings from the Virginia High School Safety Study

Issue 1

Be Strict or Be Supportive?

Debates about school safety often contrast strict discipline against more supportive approaches, but our study found support for *both* strategies. Schools that scored highest on measures of structure (students report that rules are strictly and fairly enforced) and support (students report that adults are supportive, caring, and willing to help) had lower levels of student victimization (such as theft, threats, and assaults) and bullying. As depicted below, schools low on structure and support were highest (61st to 66th percentiles) in measures of student victimization and bullying whereas schools high on structure and support were much lower (27th to 38th percentiles).
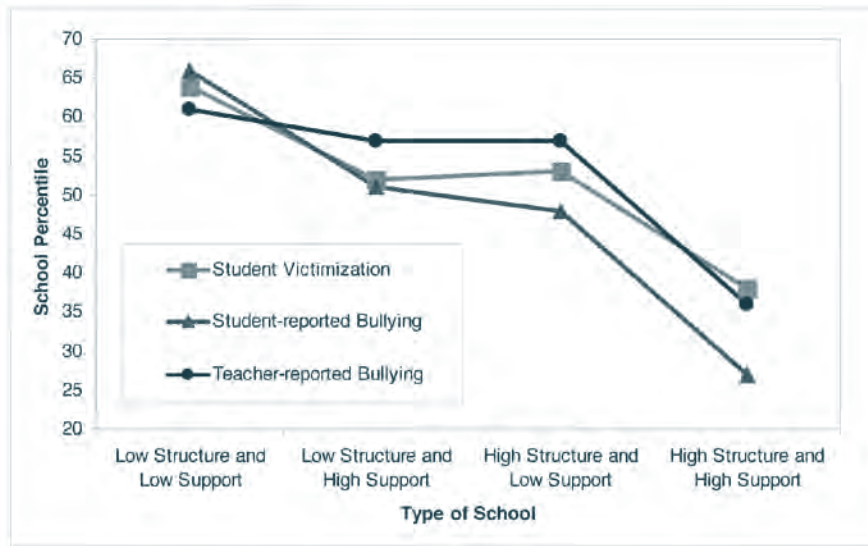
Practical Suggestions. In the safest schools, 9th grade students said that rules are strictly and fairly enforced, and that students were likely to be caught for infractions such as cutting classes, coming late to class, or smoking. At the same time, students also perceived that adults in the school really cared about all students, listened to what they had to say, and treated them with respect. However, zero tolerance policies were not associated with safer schools. Like a good parent, school staff members should be *authoritative rather than authoritarian*: communicating both high expectations and warm regard for their students.

Study Overview. The Virginia High School Safety Study was designed to identify effective policies and practices in Virginia public high schools. Safety conditions were measured using school discipline records, safety audit surveys, and surveys of approximately 7,400 9th grade students and 2,900 9th grade teachers in 294 schools. Study findings controlled for differences in school enrollment, percentage eligible for free/reduced price meals, and minority composition. This is a correlational study that can support, but not prove, causal relationships. The VHSSS was conducted by Dewey Cornell, Anne Gregory, Xitao Fan, and Peter Sheras of the Curry School of Education in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Center for School Safety of the Department of Criminal Justice Services. The study was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Study conclusions do not necessarily reflect policies or recommendations of these state and federal agencies. For more information, see the website for the Virginia Youth Violence Project: <http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu>.

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Practical Findings from the
Virginia High School Safety Study

Issue 2

How Should Schools Respond
to Student Threats of Violence?

Since 2002, the Virginia Youth Violence Project in the Curry School of Education has provided training to Virginia school divisions on the use of *threat assessment* as an approach to violence prevention. According to the 2006-07 school safety audit survey completed by principals, 95 Virginia high schools are using the Virginia model, 54 have no formal process, and 131 have some other process, typically developed in-house. VHSSS survey results show that ninth grade students in schools using the Virginia model guidelines reported less bullying and victimization, greater willingness to seek help for bullying and threats of violence, and more positive perceptions of the learning environment (felt that teachers wanted them to do well and treated them fairly) than students in either of the other two groups of schools. In addition, schools using the Virginia guidelines had fewer long-term suspensions.
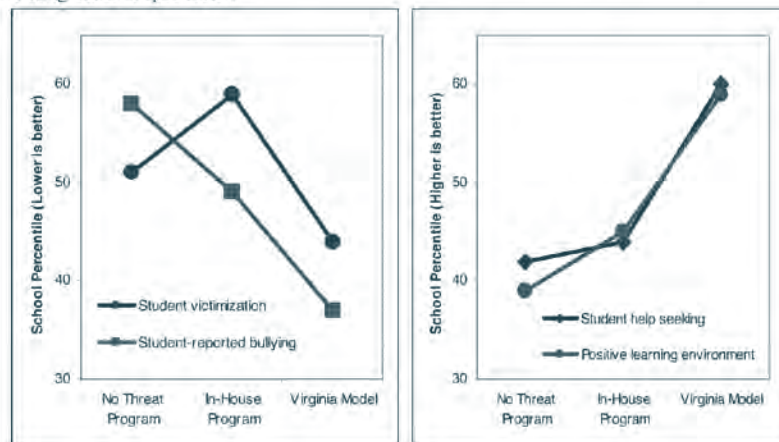
Practical Suggestions. The Virginia model trains staff to use a decision tree and published set of guidelines to assess the seriousness of student threats, quickly resolve most threats and take more extensive action in more serious, substantive cases. Threat assessment takes a problem-solving approach to resolve conflicts, bullying, and teasing before they escalate into violence. Zero tolerance policies are not needed in using this approach. Although these findings support use of the Virginia model, a correlational study cannot demonstrate that use of the model caused these differences among schools, and it is possible that schools using the Virginia model had other positive characteristics that were not controlled in this study. The three groups did not differ, however, in school size, minority composition or socio-economic status of the student body, neighborhood violent crime, or the extent of security measures in the schools.

Study Overview. The Virginia High School Safety Study was designed to identify effective policies and practices in Virginia public high schools. Safety conditions were measured using school discipline records, safety audit surveys, and surveys of approximately 7,400 9th grade students and 2,900 9th grade teachers in 294 schools. This is a correlational study that can support, but not prove, causal relationships. The VHSSS was conducted by Dewey Cornell, Anne Gregory, Xitao Fan, and Peter Sheras of the Curry School of Education in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Center for School Safety of the Department of Criminal Justice Services. The study was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Study conclusions do not necessarily reflect policies or recommendations of these state and federal agencies. For more information, see the website for the Virginia Youth Violence Project: <http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu>.

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Issue 3

How Much Teacher Victimization
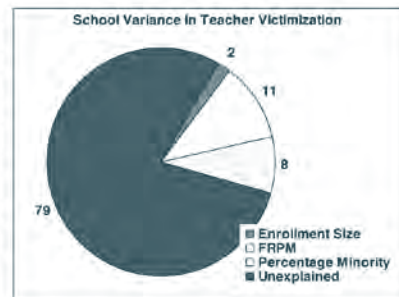# Occurs in Virginia High Schools?

Virginia High School teachers report low rates of serious victimization, although most teachers have had the experience of a student speaking to them in a disrespectful manner. The Virginia High School Safety Study surveyed 2,922 ninth grade teachers (average 10 teachers selected by random number per school) and asked them whether any of eight forms of victimization had occurred to them in school this year (spring 2007).

This year in school have any of the following happened to you personally in the school?	% Answering True
Had a weapon pulled on me.	.4
Was physically attacked and had to see a doctor.	1.1
Was physically attacked, but not seriously enough to see a doctor.	2.9
Damage to personal property worth more than $10.	13.6
Theft of personal property worth more than $10.	15.1
Was threatened in remarks by a student.	19.9
Received obscene remarks or gestures from a student.	43.1
Was spoken to in a rude or disrespectful manner by a student.	83.6

Note. Because ninth grade students have a higher rate of disciplinary infractions than other high school students, the victimization rates for these teachers may be higher than for other teachers.

Male teachers were more likely than female teachers to report having a weapon pulled on them, while female teachers were more likely than male teachers to report being spoken to in a rude or disrespectful manner. Teachers with more years of teaching experience reported slightly lower rates of victimization (in most categories) than less experienced teachers.

To examine schoolwide rates of teacher victimization, the eight categories were combined into an overall score, but because physical acts of aggression against teachers were so low, this score is largely a measure of verbal aggression. Multiple regression analyses found school enrollment size accounted for just 2% of the variance in teacher victim rates, the proportion of students eligible for free and reduced price meals (FRPM) accounted for 11%, and the proportion of minority students accounted for 8%. These three school demographics explained approximately 21% of the variance in teacher victimization. Although school demographics are important, there are substantial differences in teacher victimization even among large schools with demographically challenging student bodies.

School Variance in Teacher Victimization

2
11
8
79

■ Enrollment Size
□ FRPM
□ Percentage Minority
■ Unexplained

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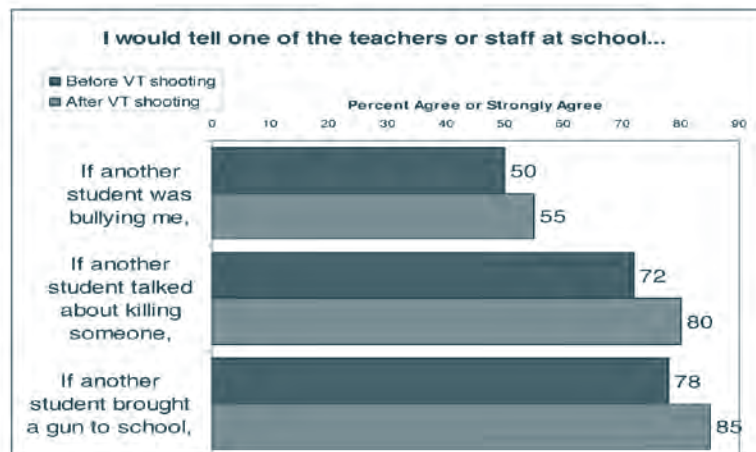
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Practical Findings from the Virginia High School Safety Study

Issue 4

How Can We Encourage Students to Seek Help to Prevent Violence?

Students may know in advance that a classmate is threatening to commit a violent act, but are reluctant to seek help. The VHSSS measured the willingness of 9th grade students to seek help for problems such as a classmate bullying, threatening, or bringing a gun to school. Schools varied widely in how willing their 9th grade students were to seek help from teachers or other adults at school. A hierarchical linear modeling analysis found that students were most willing to seek help in schools with a supportive school climate. Supportive climate was defined as student perceptions that their teachers care about them, listen to them, and treat them with fairness and respect. This finding held up across schools of different size and percentages of low income and minority students.

Because the student survey was conducted in the spring of 2007, it was possible to compare results before and after the April 16 shooting at Virginia Tech. The two groups of schools did not differ in student demographics, reports of victimization, or perceptions of school climate. However, students completing the survey after April 16 showed greater willingness to seek help from a teacher or staff member at school, suggesting that the event increased their awareness of the need to report threats of violence. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion (15-45%) of students remained unwilling to seek help for a threat of violence.

I would tell one of the teachers or staff at school...

- Before VT shooting
- After VT shooting

Percent Agree or Strongly Agree

If another student was bullying me, 50 / 55

If another student talked about killing someone, 72 / 80

If another student brought a gun to school, 78 / 85

Practical Suggestions. Although the majority of students are willing to seek help, schools should encourage all students to come forward to prevent an act of violence. VHSSS results suggest that students will be more willing to seek help when (1) they are reminded of the serious consequences of violence and (2) believe that their teachers have positive regard and respect for them. Schools should strive for a school climate where students feel that their teachers treat them with fairness and respect. Students should be taught the difference between *snitching* (personal gain from getting someone else in trouble) and *seeking help* (no motive other than preventing violence).

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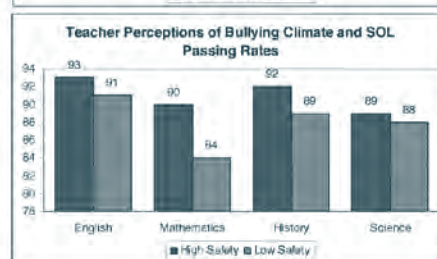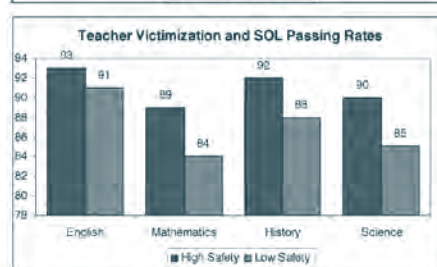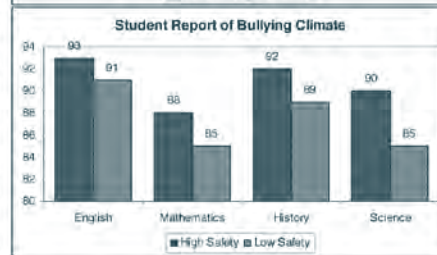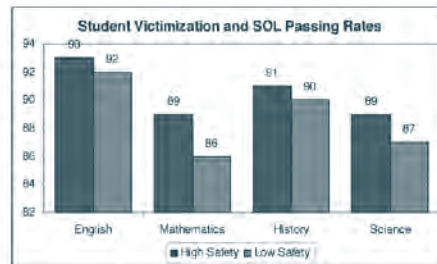## Practical Findings from the Virginia High School Safety Study

Issue 5

Does School Safety Influence SOL Achievement?

Most Virginia high schools have a high passing rate on the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests, but those with greater student and teacher safety have an even higher rate. To measure school safety for students and teachers, our survey asked randomly selected samples of 9th grade students: (1) how frequently they are victims of thefts, threats, abusive language, and assaults (victimization); and (2) how much bullying and teasing they observe at school (bullying climate); and asked 9th grade teachers: (3) how often they are victims (teacher victimization); and (4) how much student bullying and teasing they observe at school (teacher perceptions of bullying climate). Multiple regression analyses found that all four measures of safety were predictive of one or more of the schoolwide (grades 9-12) passing rates for English, Mathematics, History, and Science, even after controlling for the percentage of minority students and percentage of students receiving a free or reduced price meal in the school.

The charts show the passing rates for schools in the top third versus bottom third on each safety measure. For example, schools with student victimization rates in the top third of the state had an average Mathematics SOL passing rate of 86 percent, but schools with the lowest (safest) levels of victimization had an 89 percent average passing rate. Although the percent gains are small, they reflect *schoolwide* rates (grades 9-12) and they are consistent across all measures and they are statistically significant improvements above and beyond differences due to student demographics. Certainly the quality of academic instruction is critical to SOL achievement, but school safety conditions can make a clear difference in the school's overall passing rate.

Practical Suggestions. Schools may be able to improve their SOL passing rates by improving school safety conditions. School should make systematic efforts to reduce victimization of students and teachers as well as the level of teasing and bullying among students. In previous reports, we pointed out the importance of a balanced approach to school safety that emphasizes both support for students and a clear and consistent discipline policy.

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Student Victimization and SOL Passing Rates

Student Report of Bullying Climate

Teacher Victimization and SOL Passing Rates

Teacher Perceptions of Bullying Climate and SOL Passing Rates

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Practical Findings from the Virginia High School Safety Study

Issue 6

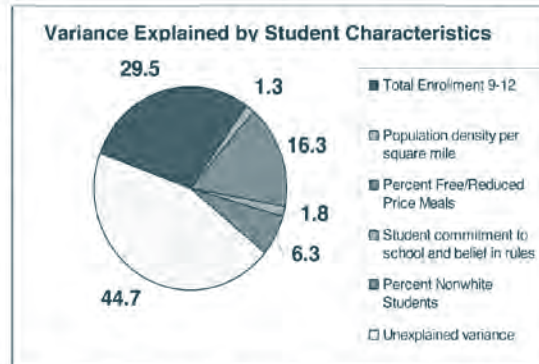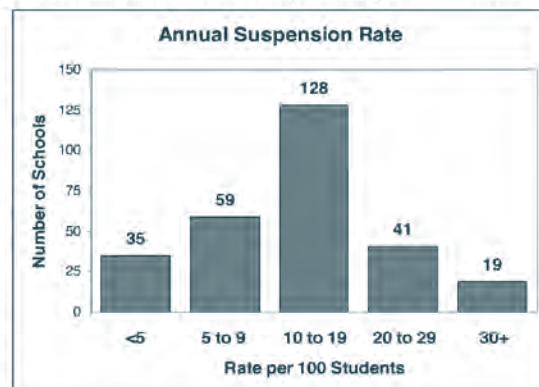## Why do suspension rates vary so much from school to school?

In 2006-07, the typical Virginia high school issued 10-19 suspensions per 100 students, but there was a wide range, from 35 schools that had fewer than 5 suspensions per 100 students to 19 schools that had 30 or more suspensions per 100 students. Three high schools had rates that exceeded 50 per 100 students. Why do suspension rates vary so much from school to school? (These figures combine short and long-term suspensions and count suspensions rather than students, so that one student could be suspended multiple times and increase the school's suspension rate).

We used hierarchical multiple regression to assess how much variance in suspensions was associated with population characteristics, starting with (1) Size of the student body, and then adding (2) Urbanicity (census population density per square mile); (3) Poverty rate (% of students eligible for free/reduced price meals); (4) Student commitment to school and belief in school rules (survey of 9th grade students); and (5) Minority composition (% nonwhite students).

As the pie chart shows, a total of 55.3% of the variance can be explained by school population characteristics – most notably student body size (29.5%; as would be expected, larger schools have more suspensions), poverty rate (16.3%), and minority composition (6.3%). Relatively little of the variance is associated with the urban-rural location of the school (1.3%) or student commitment to school and belief in school rules (1.8%). After considering all these factors, there is still a great deal of unexplained variance across schools (44.7%).

Practical Suggestions. Schools with high suspension rates should carefully consider why so many students are being suspended (including some students who are suspended multiple times). *Schools with comparable student demographics are not suspending at similar rates.* Much of the variance among schools cannot be explained by the student demographics we measured. There is a body of educational research suggesting that school suspension is not an effective way to improve student behavior and often leads to declining behavioral and academic outcomes for students. This suggests that schools with high suspension rates may be engaging in a counterproductive practice.

Study Overview. The Virginia High School Safety Study was designed to identify effective policies and practices in Virginia public high schools. Safety conditions were measured using school discipline records and surveys of approximately 7,400 9th grade students in 294 schools. This is a correlational study that can support, but not prove, causal relationships. The VHSSS was conducted by Dewey Cornell, Anne Gregory, Xitao Fan, and Peter Sheras of the Curry School of Education in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Center for School Safety of the Department of Criminal Justice Services. The study was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Study conclusions do not necessarily reflect policies or recommendations of these state and federal agencies. For more information, see the website for the Virginia Youth Violence Project: <http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu>.

Annual Suspension Rate

Number of Schools vs Rate per 100 Students:
- <5: 35
- 5 to 9: 59
- 10 to 19: 128
- 20 to 29: 41
- 30+: 19

Variance Explained by Student Characteristics

- 29.5 — Total Enrollment 9-12
- 1.3 — Population density per square mile
- 16.3 — Percent Free/Reduced Price Meals
- 1.8 — Student commitment to school and belief in rules
- 6.3 — Percent Nonwhite Students
- 44.7 — Unexplained variance

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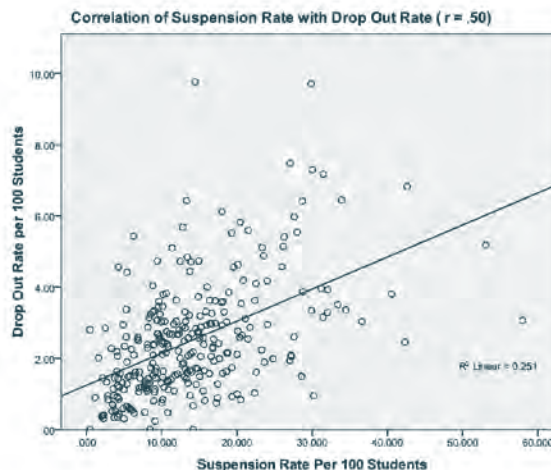## Practical Findings from the Virginia High School Safety Study

Issue 7

How are suspension rates related to dropout rates?

In Issue 6, we reported that suspension rates vary greatly in Virginia high schools and that only about half of the variance across schools could be explained by student demographics, such as school size, student poverty rate, and minority composition. In this Issue, we report that *schools that use suspension most frequently tend to have high dropout rates.* Using the new Virginia standards for determining dropout rates, we examined average dropout rates for 2 years (2006-07 and 2007-08) in 287 Virginia high schools. For example, the scatterplot chart below shows how the average drop-out rate is correlated ($r = .50$) with the short-term suspension rate. Using hierarchical multiple regression, we found that a school's suspension rate (including short- and long-term suspension and expulsion) was consistently predictive of dropout rates for the whole school, and that there were similar effects for White and Black students considered separately. The effect of suspension rates on dropout rates was statistically significant even after controlling for the influence of school demographics (percentage of students eligible for free/reduced price meals, percentage of minority students, urbanicity, and average per pupil expenditure). Recognizing that some schools may deal with more challenging populations of students, we also controlled statistically for the influence of student attitudes that can lead to disciplinary infractions by using measures of student attitudes toward the use of aggression and belief in following school rules (two scales from our school climate survey administered to 9th grade students). In sum, the frequent use of suspension as a disciplinary practice is predictive of higher drop out rates for both White and Black students, and is not explained by other school demographics or by student attitudes that are associated with breaking school rules.

Practical Suggestions. Students choose to drop out of school for a variety of personal as well as educational reasons. Undoubtedly, students at risk for dropping out of school could benefit from individualized counseling and academic support to help them finish high school. However, schoolwide policies and practices could also be helpful in creating a school environment that helps keep at-risk students in school. Our results suggest, but do not prove, that schools may be able to reduce their dropout rates by placing less emphasis on suspension as a disciplinary consequence and using alternative consequences that do not involve school removal. Many Virginia high schools have low suspension rates despite student demographics and risk factors that are present in schools with high suspension rates. As we noted in Issue 6, there is a body of educational research indicating that school suspension is not an effective way to improve student behavior and often leads to declining behavioral and academic outcomes for students. Schools with high suspension rates may be engaging in a counterproductive practice.

Correlation of Suspension Rate with Drop Out Rate (r = .50)

Study Overview. The Virginia High School Safety Study was designed to identify effective policies and practices in Virginia public high schools. This is a correlational study that can support, but not prove, causal relationships. The VHSSS was conducted by Dewey Cornell, Anne Gregory, Xitao Fan, and Peter Sheras of the Curry School of Education in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Center for School Safety of the Department of Criminal Justice Services. The findings in this Issue are derived from a doctoral dissertation by Talisha Lee. The study was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Study conclusions do not necessarily reflect policies or recommendations of these state and federal agencies. For more information, see the website for the Virginia Youth Violence Project: <http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu>.

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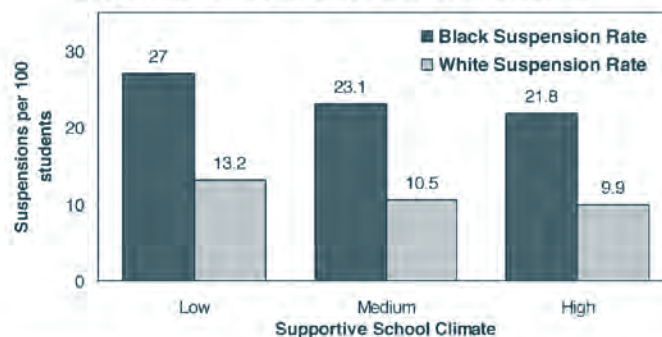
Issue 8

Can a Supportive School Climate Reduce Suspension Rates for Black and White Students?

In Issue 7, we reported that schools with high suspension rates also had high dropout rates. Therefore, we looked for school characteristics that might help reduce suspension rates. We examined the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who received at least one short-term school suspension during the 2006-07 school year. In Virginia high schools, the suspension rate for Black students (24 per 100 students) was approximately double the suspension rate for White students (11 per 100 students), so we examined these groups separately. Certainly student misbehavior is the most important factor in suspension rates, but we wanted to investigate whether a characteristic of the school climate could help explain why suspension rates differed so much across schools. Although we could not test a causal model directly in a correlational study, we could determine whether a more positive school climate was associated with lower suspension rates. We measured Supportive School Climate using a sample of approximately 25 ninth grade students from each school who described the extent to which adults at the school are supportive, caring, and willing to help. We found that a supportive school climate showed a modest correlation with suspension rates in the entire school for both Black ($r = .29$) and White ($r = .30$) students. This relationship is illustrated in the chart, which divided a sample of 201 schools into thirds (designated Low, Medium, High) based on supportive school climate scores. We adjusted suspension rates statistically for the effects of school size, percentage of students eligible for a free/reduced price meal, and urbanicity (residents per square mile in the school attendance zone).

Practical Suggestions. *Schools may be able to improve student behavior and reduce suspension rates by building a supportive school climate.* It is important for students to feel that the adults in the school are caring and concerned, and treat them with respect. It may be that when students feel respected and cared for, they cooperate with the rules or resolve conflict with adult support, before the problem becomes more serious. Certainly there are other factors that contribute to suspension rates, but it is noteworthy that this factor emerged as a predictor of schoolwide suspension rates even though the measure of school climate was limited to the perceptions of 9th grade students. We continue to seek ways to reduce the large gap between White and Black suspension rates.

Supportive School Climate is Associated with Suspension Rates for Black and White Students

Y-axis: Suspensions per 100 students
Legend: Black Suspension Rate, White Suspension Rate
Low: Black 27, White 13.2; Medium: Black 23.1, White 10.5; High: Black 21.8, White 9.9
X-axis: Supportive School Climate

Study Overview. The Virginia High School Safety Study was designed to identify effective policies and practices in Virginia public high schools. This is a correlational study that can support, but not prove, causal relationships. In the analyses for Issue 8, we omitted 35 schools with fewer than 10 White or Black students so that suspension rates would not be skewed by small numbers of students. We also lacked data on 54 schools with 1-9 suspensions, per Department of Education policy on the release of data for groups of fewer than 10 students. This may have diminished the effect of school climate in schools with the lowest suspension rates. Additional statistical information is available from the authors. The VHSSS was conducted by Dewey Cornell, Anne Gregory, Xitao Fan, and Peter Sheras of the Curry School of Education in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education and Virginia Center for School Safety of the Department of Criminal Justice Services. The study was funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Study conclusions do not necessarily reflect policies or recommendations of these state and federal agencies. For more information, see the website for the Virginia Youth Violence Project: <http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu>.
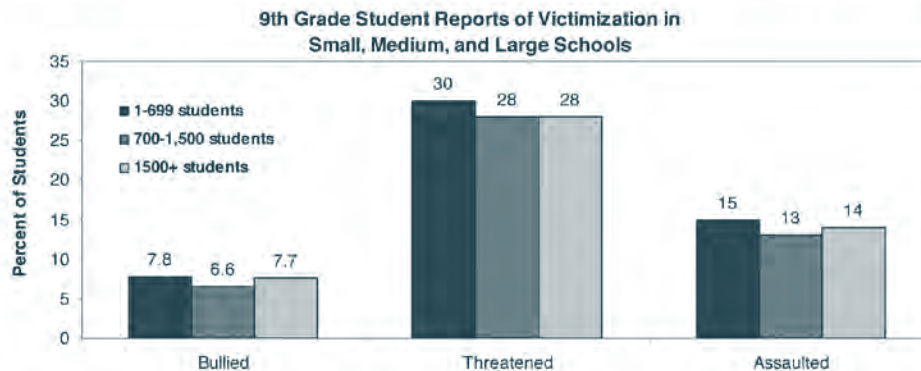
Practical Findings from the Virginia High School Safety Study

Issue 9

Do larger schools really have more student bullying and victimization?

There is a widely accepted view that larger schools are less safe environments than smaller schools. In our sample of 290 Virginia high schools, we examined the effects of school size using hierarchical multiple regression to control statistically for the influence of other school demographics (student poverty, minority composition, urbanicity). We found that 9th grade students and teachers reported that they *observed* more bullying and teasing taking place in larger schools than smaller schools. And in fact, there were more incidents of student victimization in larger schools, according to school discipline records. However, one can expect more incidents of student victimization simply because there were more students. Most importantly, when we examined the *rates* of bullying, threats, and physical assault, using both students' reports and school discipline records, there were no positive correlations with school size. Simply put, students were not at greater risk of victimization in a larger school. Factors such as student body poverty and minority composition had a small positive association with victimization rates, but contrary to popular perception, urban location was negatively correlated with assault. Although these other school demographics generated significant statistical effects, *school size did not matter*. The chart below is a simple representation of the percentage of 9th grade students who reported being bullied, verbally threatened, or physically assaulted in the past month in 89 small (1-699), 97 medium (700-1,500) and 104 large (1,500+) schools.

9th Grade Student Reports of Victimization in Small, Medium, and Large Schools

	Bullied	Threatened	Assaulted
1-699 students	7.8	30	15
700-1,500 students	6.6	28	13
1500+ students	7.7	28	14

Practical Suggestions. School size by itself does not place students at greater risk for being bullied, threatened, or assaulted. Students may feel less safe in larger schools because they observe or hear about such incidents more frequently. This phenomenon is analogous to citizens who hear frequent news reports of violent crimes because they live in large cities and consequently believe they are at increased risk of being a crime victim, even though the violent crime rates might be lower than some smaller communities. From a school safety perspective, more important than the size of the school is the staffing level of the school and the proportion of students who may be at increased risk for school difficulties.

Project Staff

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services

Criminal Justice Research Center

Sherri Johnson, *Evaluation Specialist*

Jim McDonough, *Manager*

Amber Terrell, *Evaluation Specialist*

Virginia Center for School Safety

Steve Clark

Melissa Leigh

Donna Michaelis

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