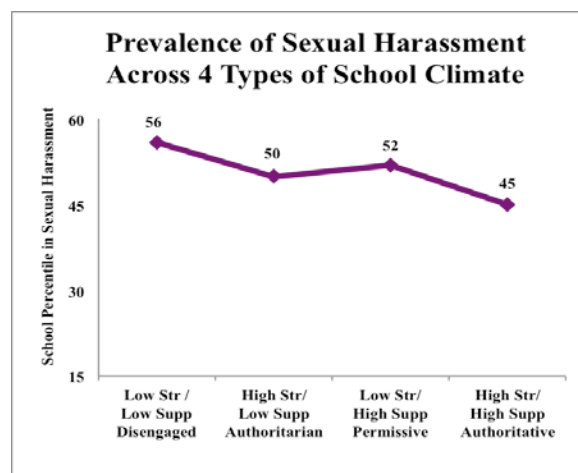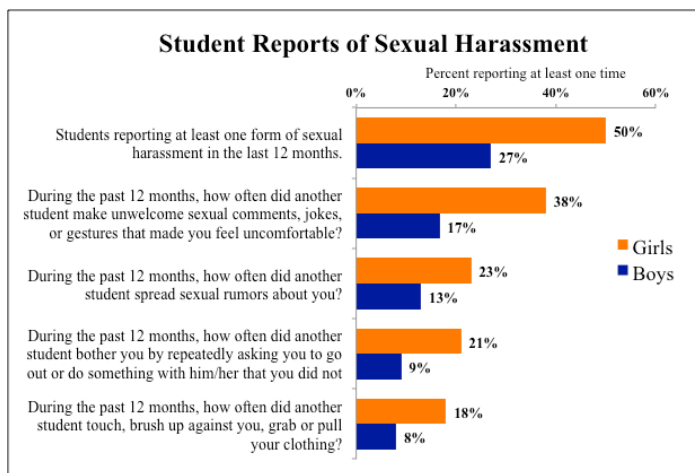# Authoritative High Schools Have Less Sexual Harassment

In spring 2017, the high school survey added questions about sexual harassment. These questions help schools respond to the Dear Colleague letter of the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (2011) reminding schools of their Title IX responsibilities to curb sexual harassment among students <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.pdf>.

The survey found that both male and female students report substantial levels of sexual harassment, using items derived from the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Sexual Harassment Survey: <http://www.aauw.org/files/2013/02/Crossing-the-Line-Sexual-Harassment-at-School.pdf>. The survey was completed by 62,679 students in grades 9-12 in 320 Virginia public schools. The four types of sexual harassment were summed into a total score for each student, and the average for all students in a school was used to determine each school's percentile relative to the state. Our research found that high schools with an authoritative climate report less sexual harassment than other high schools. As described in Issue 1, an authoritative school is one in which students report that their teachers are strict but fair in their discipline (high structure) *and* concerned and respectful toward them (high support). In contrast, there are schools with high structure but low support (authoritarian), high support but low structure (permissive), or low structure and low support (disengaged). As shown in the chart, sexual harassment experienced by students was at the 42nd percentile in authoritative schools versus the 59th percentile in disengaged schools. These comparisons controlled for poverty level and minority composition of the student body as well as school size.

Practical Suggestions. Schools should educate students about behaviors that are considered sexual harassment, how they can obtain help, and ways to support their peers. A federal Checklist for a Comprehensive Approach to Addressing Harassment is available: <https://ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/checklist.html>. To build an authoritative school climate, teachers and other school authorities should communicate high disciplinary expectations that are strictly but fairly enforced. In addition, they should build supportive relationships so that students feel cared for and respected.