

***School Threat Assessment as a Fair and
Equitable School Safety Response***

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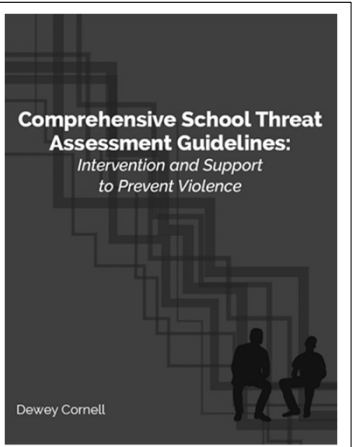
Panel Presentation for
School Safety at a Crossroads: Can Schools’ Responses to the Latest “Safety
Crisis” Protect Students without Promoting Inequality?
American Sociological Association Annual Meeting
Philadelphia PA 8-20-23



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Topics

- 1. Concept of threat assessment**
- 2. Virginia controlled studies**
- 3. Florida statewide evaluation**




**Dr. Cornell discloses
that he has a financial
interest in CSTAG.**

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**How often do
our schools
conduct threat
assessments?**


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**When a student seems
angry, everyone
engages in some form
of threat assessment.**


***The question is whether
staff rely on their
intuition or use a
systematic process.***

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In the absence of a formal threat assessment process, many schools rely on zero tolerance, automatically removing a student from school, regardless of the seriousness or context of the behavior.

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Removing a student from school does not increase safety.

We want to supervise, teach, and support a student in school.

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Threat assessment is an alternative to zero tolerance

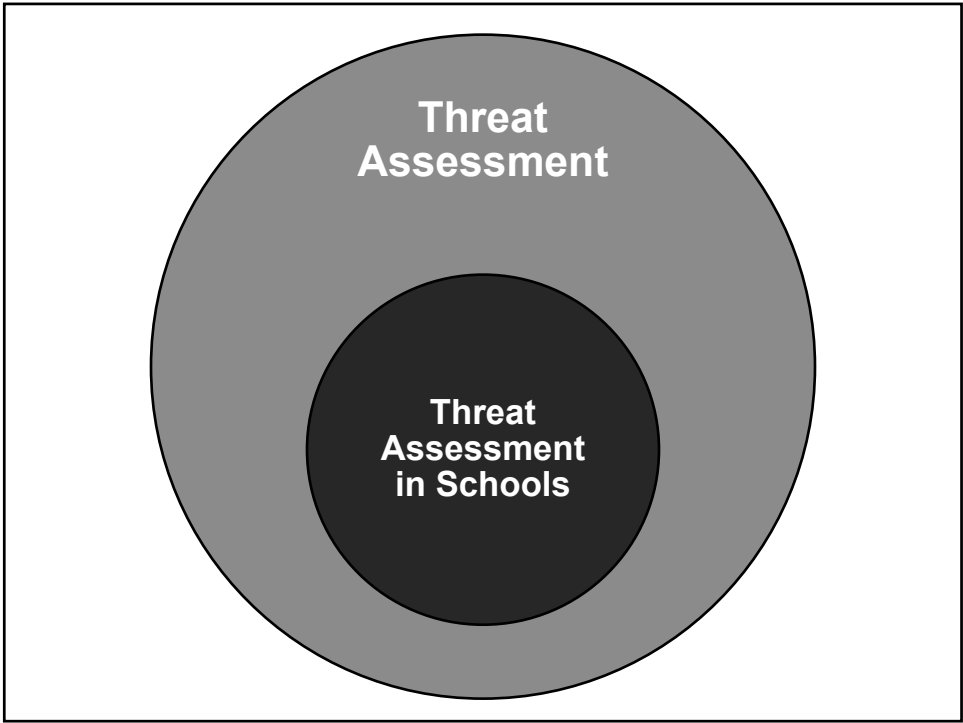
- **Zero tolerance uses punitive discipline for all students regardless of the circumstances or the seriousness of their behavior.**
- **Threat assessment considers the context and content of the behavior. The student’s intentions matter.**

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Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM)

- 1. Identification:** friends, family members, or others seek help when concerned about someone in distress/threatening violence.
- 2. Evaluation:** Threat assessment team evaluates the seriousness of the threat.
- 3. Intervention:** The team initiates assistance to address the underlying problem, conflict or need. In the most serious cases, protective action is taken.

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School-Based Threat Assessment

1. Compared to adults, students
 - frequently make threats;
 - often engage in fights;
2. Over-reactions to student misbehavior have serious negative consequences.
3. Schools have a duty to educate all students.

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Threat Assessment Steers Between 2 Errors



Overreaction

Excessive punishment for a threat that is not serious

Underreaction

Failing to prevent a serious threat.



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Questions about Fairness and Equity

- There is nationwide disproportionality in school discipline for students of color and students with disabilities.
- There are publicized cases where students received excessively punitive responses for minor misbehavior that was regarded as a threat.

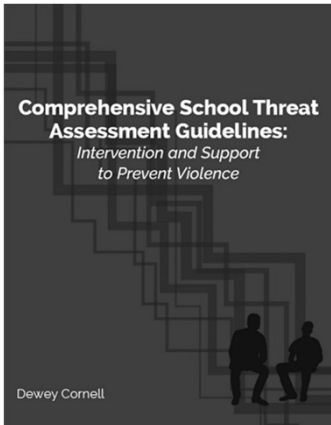
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Fairness and Equity Concerns

- Threat assessment must be a fair and equitable process for all students.
- We want to avoid unfairly excessive punishment or criminalization for minor misbehavior.
- We want equitable treatment of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and regardless of disability status.

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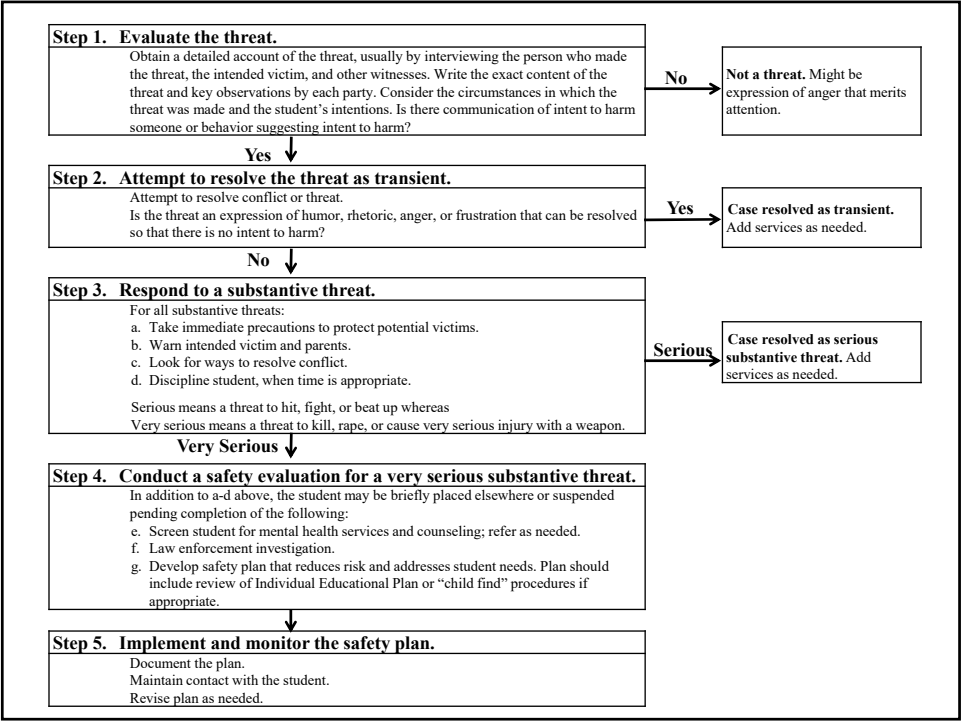
Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines



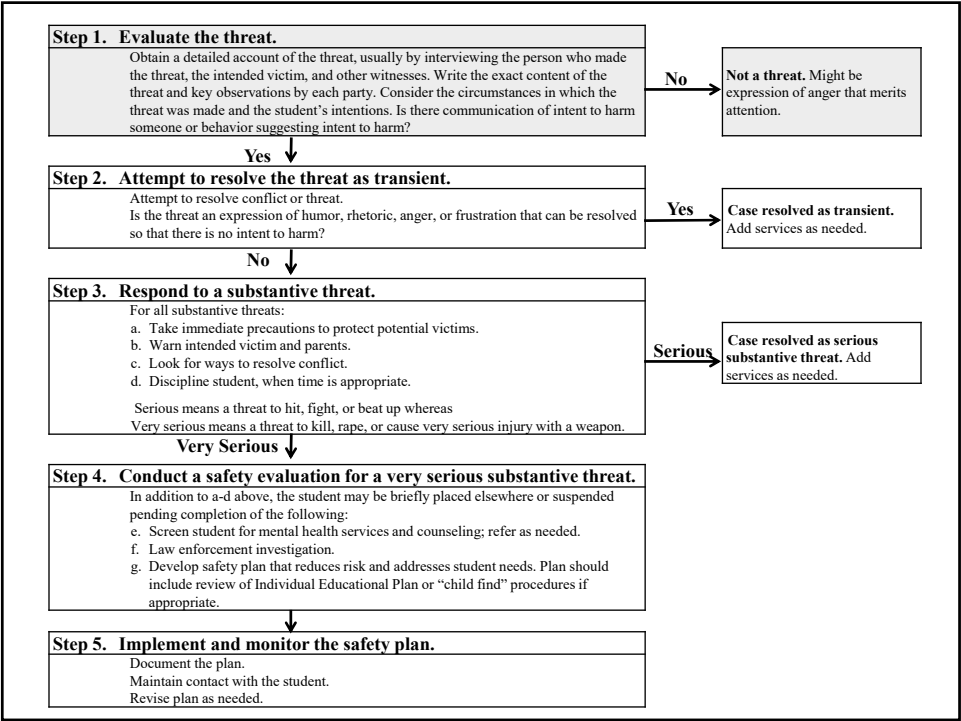
Dr. Cornell discloses that he has a financial interest in CSTAG.

- Developed 2001 at University of Virginia
- School-based teams gather information
- Follow decision-tree to determine whether threat is transient or substantive
- Take protective action if substantive
- Attempt to resolve the problem underlying the threat

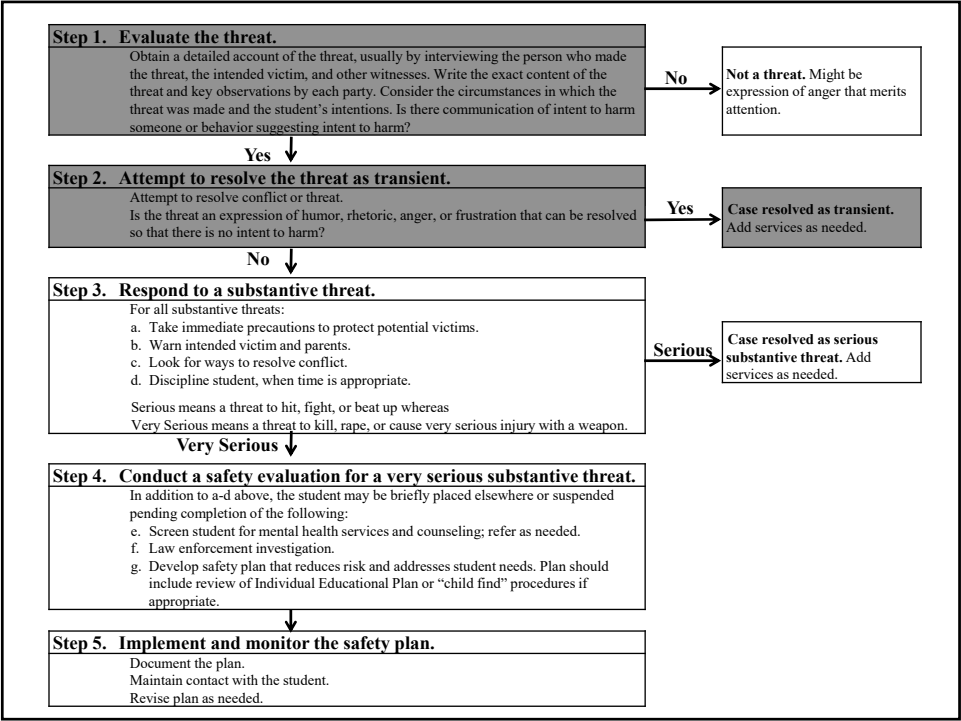
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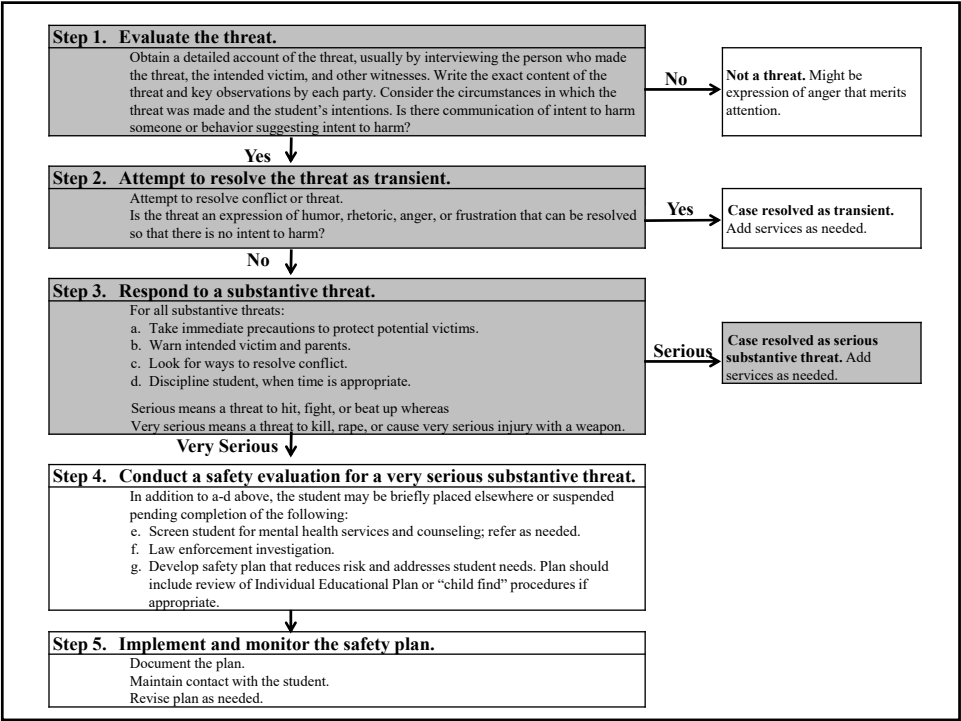
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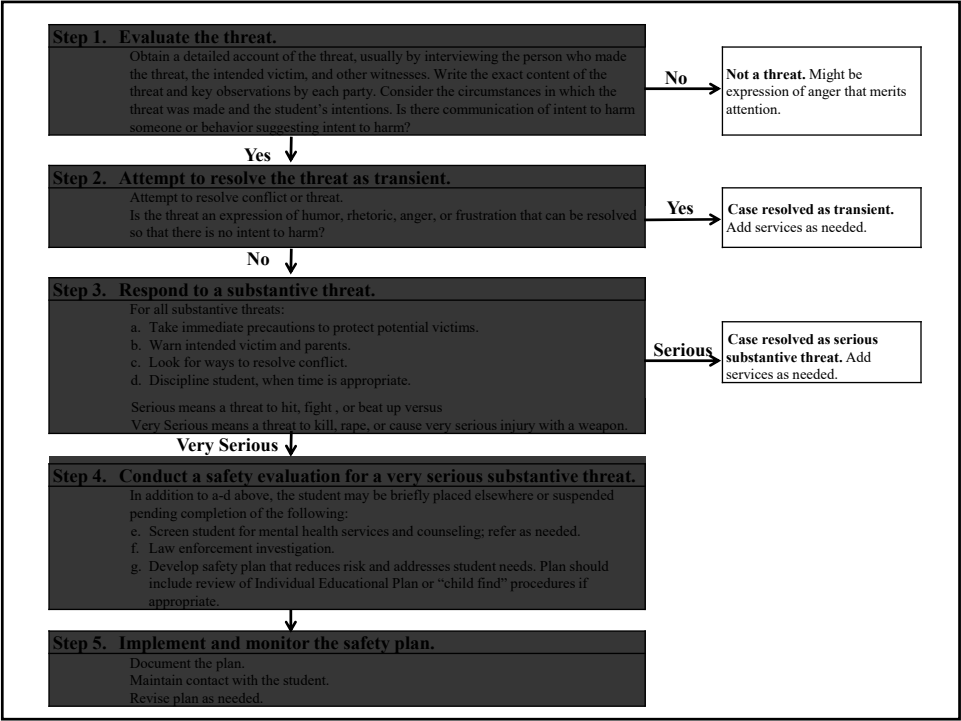
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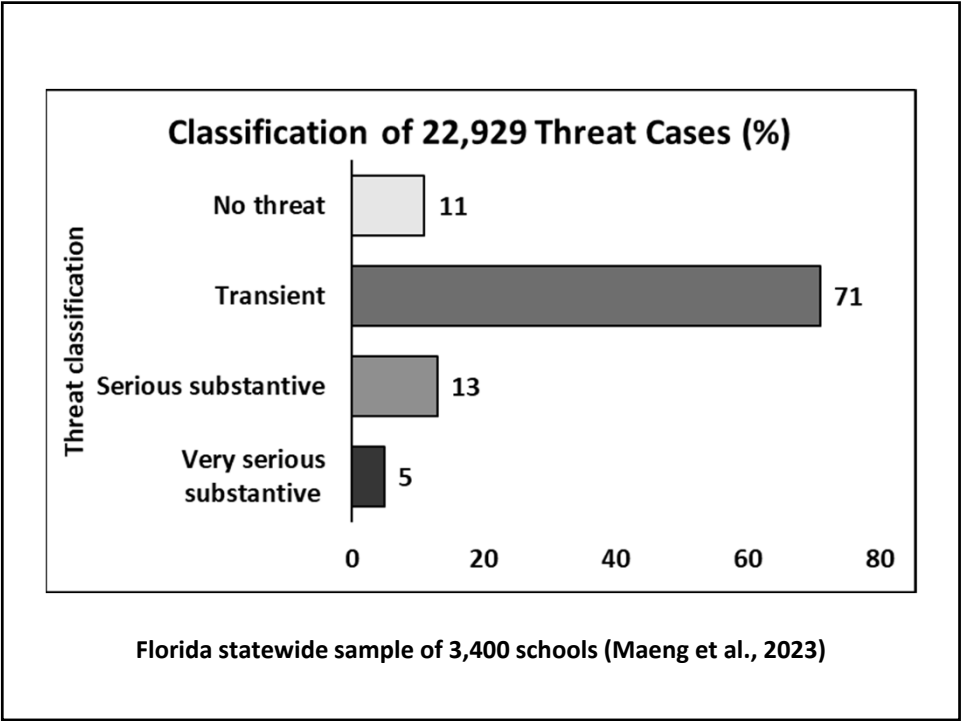
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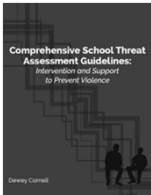
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Research on Threat Assessment

1. Field-test

What happens when you try the model?

2. Controlled studies

Cross-sectional, retrospective study:

How do schools using the model compare to other schools?

Pre-post study:

How do schools change after adopting the model?

Randomized controlled trial:

What happens to students in schools randomly chosen to use the model?

3. Large-scale implementation

What happens when the whole state adopts the model?

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Research on Threat Assessment

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Safety Outcomes

1. Thousands of threats resolved without violence. Few threats attempted. Mostly fights.
2. 99% no serious injuries.
3. No shootings or fatalities to date.
4. Less bullying and peer aggression.
5. Students and teachers report more positive school climate.

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Disciplinary Outcomes Using Threat Assessment

1. Most students remain in school.
2. Reductions in out-of-school suspensions.
3. Little or no racial/ethnic disparity in suspension.

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Randomized Controlled Trial

- **40 schools (K-12)**
- **Randomly assigned to CSTAG training**
- **1 year follow-up**
- **201 students**

School Psychology Review, 2012

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Randomized Controlled Trial

Students in threat assessment schools...

- **Received more counseling (logistic regression odds ratio = 3.98)**
- **More parent involvement (OR = 2.57)**
- **Fewer long-term suspensions (OR = 0.35)**
- **Fewer alternative placements (OR = 0.13)**
- **No differences for Black v White students**

School Psychology Review, 2012

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Florida Statewide Implementation

Following the 2018 Parkland shooting, Florida mandated threat assessment in its 4,000 public schools.
Schools received CSTAG training and submitted case data to FL DOE.

Statewide Implementation of School Threat Assessment in Florida is funded by the U.S. Dept of Justice (2020-RF-CX-002) and conducted in collaboration with the Office of Safe Schools of the Florida Department of Education. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations of this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Florida Department of Education or the U.S.Department of Justice. Dr. Cornell discloses that he has a financial interest in the CSTAG model.

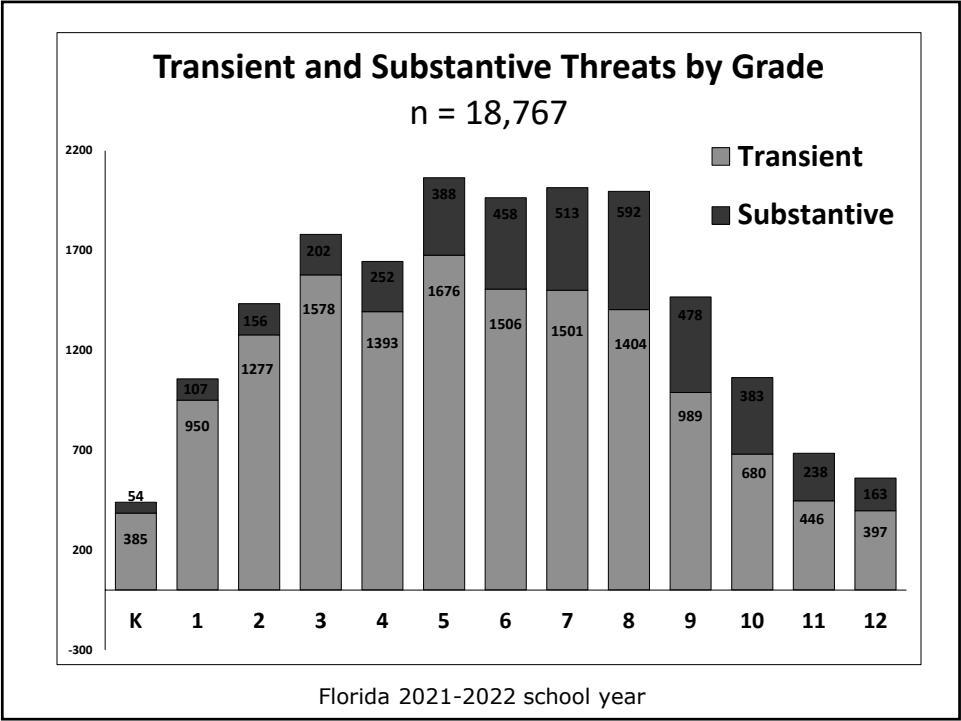
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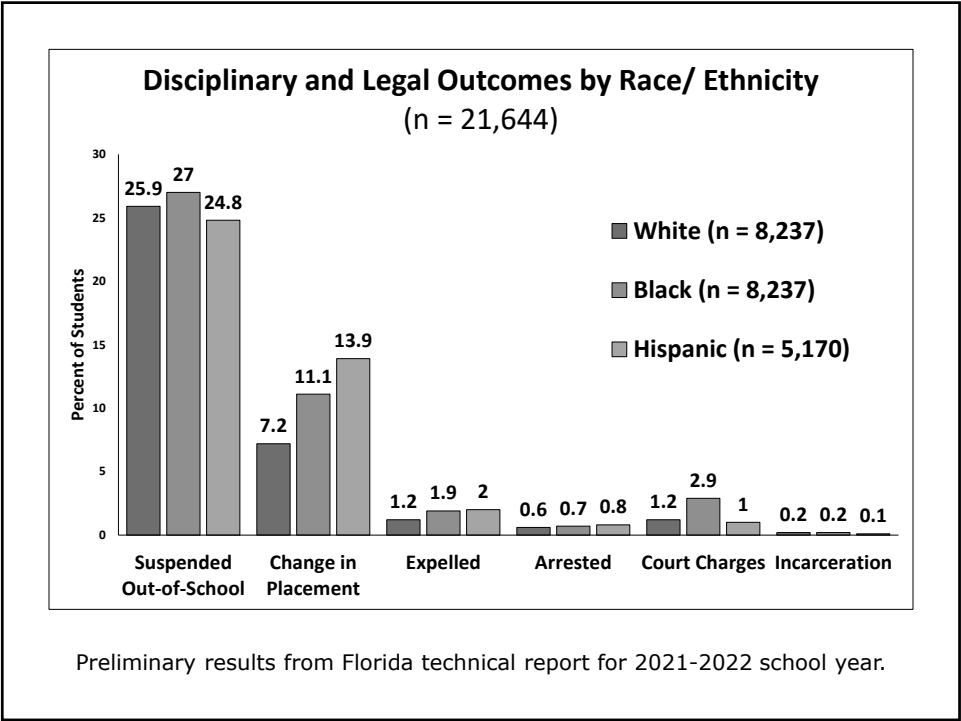
Florida Statewide Implementation

- 60 of 67 Florida districts
- 3,400 schools
- 23,000 threat cases
- 2021-22 school year

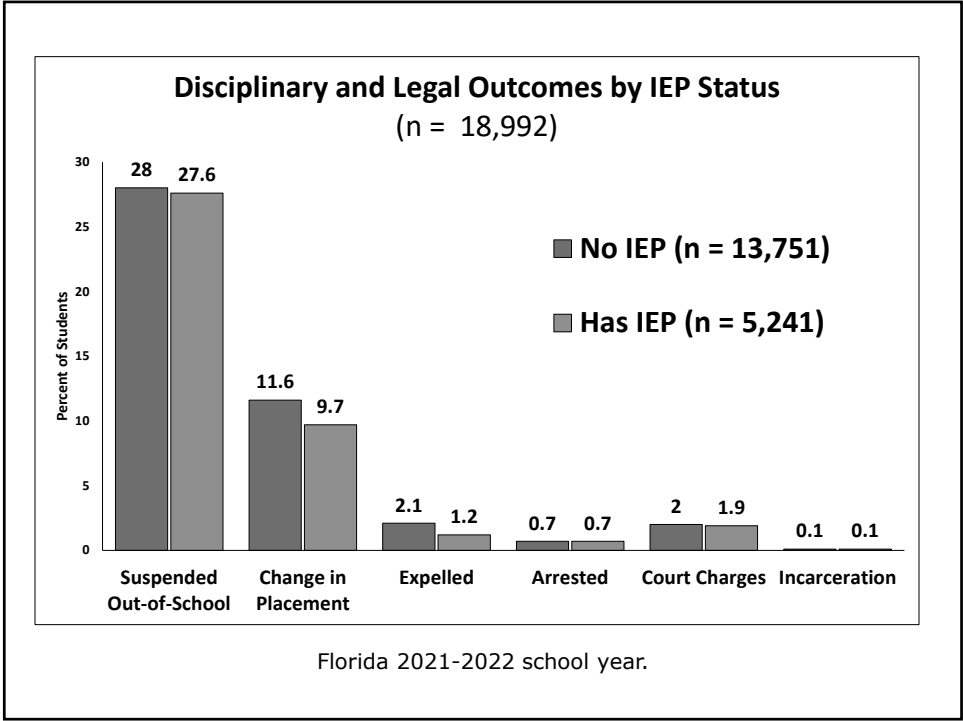
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Differences by Color and Disability

There were small or no differences in disciplinary and legal outcomes for students receiving a threat assessment compared by race/ethnicity or disability status.

These findings contrast with large differences found for the general population of students who receive disciplinary consequences in U.S. schools.

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Fairness and Equity

- Teams must monitor their student outcomes for fairness and equity.
- Districts must investigate and take prompt action if there is evidence of unfairness or inequity.

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What factors contribute to fairness and equity in student discipline and law enforcement actions?

- **Training program**
- **Emphasis on student needs**
- **Structured protocol and criteria**
- **Multidisciplinary team**

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Conclusions

Threat assessment is a promising approach to school safety that can help schools respond to concerns about student violence in a safe, fair, and equitable manner.