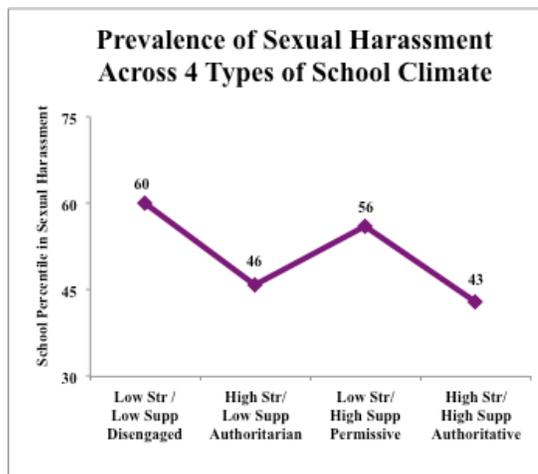
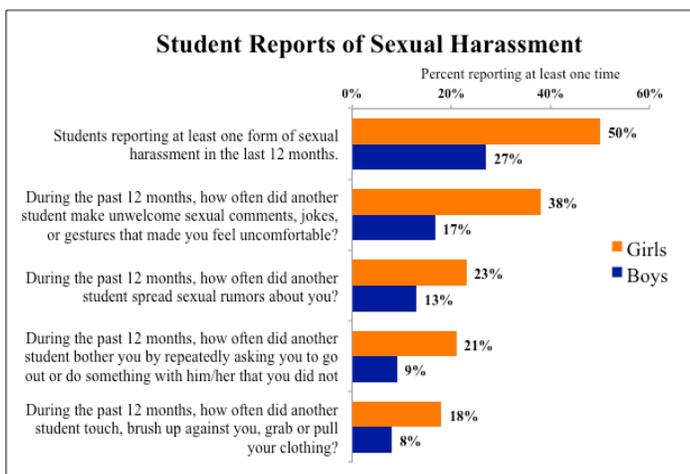


Authoritative High Schools Have Less Sexual Harassment

In spring 2016, 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 43rd percentile in authoritative schools versus the 60th 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.

Study Overview. The Virginia Secondary School Climate Survey (including scales from the Authoritative School Climate Survey) was administered as a component of the Virginia School Safety Audit program carried out by the Virginia Center for School Safety of the Department of Criminal Justice Services, in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Education. The survey was designed to yield practical information on school climate and safety conditions that can be used to improve conditions for learning. The survey was developed by researchers (P.I. Dewey Cornell) at the Virginia Youth Violence Project of the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia. This project was supported by Grant #2012-JF-FX-0062 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and Grant #NIJ 2014-CK-BX-0004 awarded by the National Institute of Justice, both from the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice. This is a correlational study that can support, but not prove, causal relationships. More detailed analyses are available from the Virginia Youth Violence Project: <<http://youthviolence.edschool.virginia.edu>>.