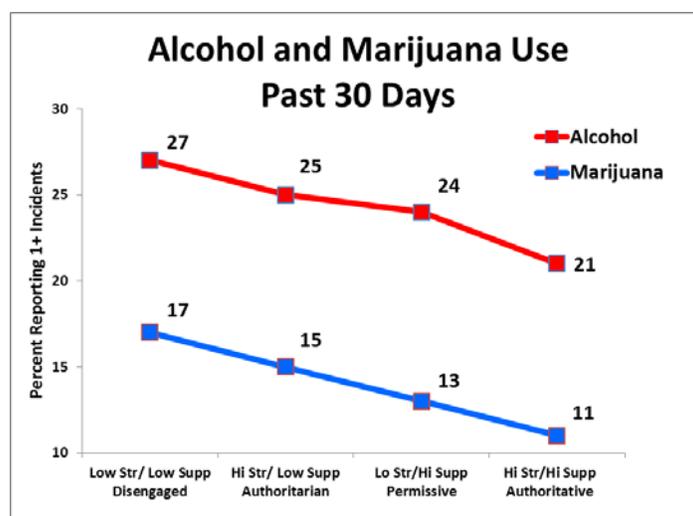


Students in Authoritative High Schools Report Less Alcohol and Marijuana Use

Our research found that students in high schools with an authoritative climate report lower rates of alcohol and marijuana use than students in other schools. As described in Issue 1, an authoritative school is one in which students report that their teachers are strict but fair in their discipline (high structure) *and* concerned and respectful toward them (high support). In contrast, there are schools with high structure but low support (authoritarian), high support but low structure (permissive), or low structure and low support (disengaged). School climate was measured with surveys of 48,027 students in grades 9-12 in 323 Virginia public schools. Students were asked about drinking alcohol and using marijuana in the past 30 days with the same questions used on the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey. As shown in the chart, drinking alcohol averaged 21% and marijuana use averaged 11% in authoritative schools, versus 27% and 17% respectively in disengaged schools. The comparisons of school types controlled for differences in size, poverty level, and minority composition of the student enrollment as well as differences in student race, gender, GPA, and parent education.



Practical Suggestions. Educators do not have to choose between being strict versus being supportive with their students; the best strategy is to strive for both. Several studies have found that students in a positive school climate are less likely to engage in substance abuse. Schools should use evidence-based programs, which means that controlled studies have found them to be effective. The National Registry of Evidence-based programs and Practices is a helpful resource for evidence-based programs: <<http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/Index.aspx>>. Another federal resource is the Center for Substantive Abuse Prevention: <<http://www.samhsa.gov/about-us/who-we-are/offices-centers/csap>>. The Virginia Department of Education has information on student assistance programming and related resources: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student_assistance_programming/index.shtml>

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