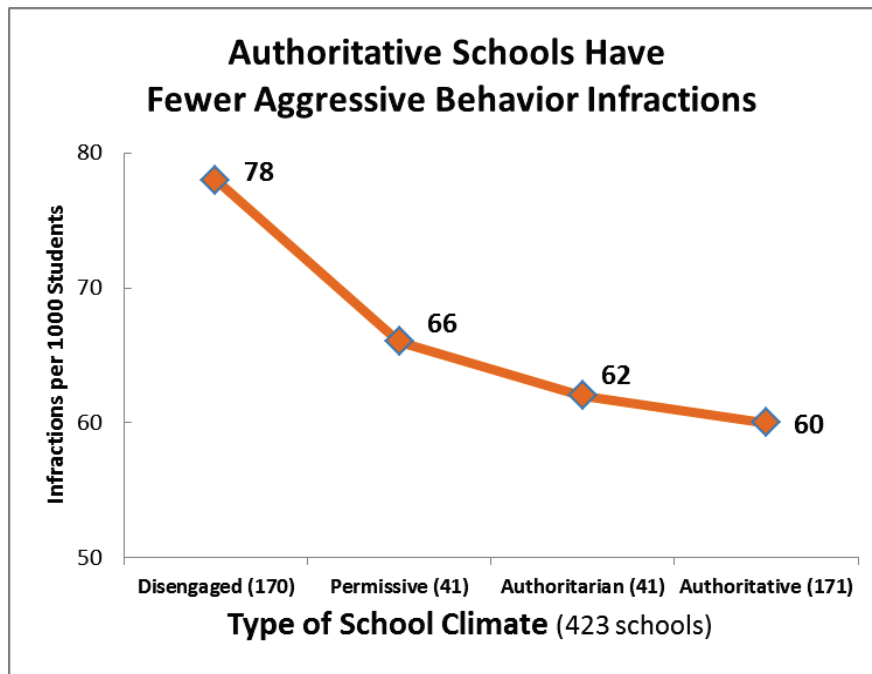


Authoritative Schools have Fewer Disciplinary Infractions for Aggressive Behavior

Our research found that authoritative schools have lower rates of disciplinary infractions for aggressive behavior than 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 7th and 8th grade students in 423 Virginia public schools. Aggressive behavior infraction rates were based on annual state records for the number of disciplinary infractions resulting in school suspension for infractions such as fighting, assault, bullying, and harassment. As shown in the chart, authoritative schools averaged 60 violent disciplinary infractions per 1,000 students compared to 78 infractions for disengaged schools. The comparisons of school types controlled for differences in size, poverty level, and minority composition of the student enrollment.



Practical Suggestions. Teachers do not have to choose between being strict versus being supportive with their students. The best strategy is to do both. Teacher discipline should convince students that they have high standards and are strict in their enforcement of school rules, but that they treat all students fairly. They should convey concern and respect for their students and a desire for all of them to do well. They should encourage them to seek help for problems or concerns such as bullying. There is substantial evidence that school suspension is not an effective disciplinary practice and that schools should consider alternative approaches. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education issued new recommendations and policy guidance on school discipline < <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/index.html>>.

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) with the Youth-Nex Center to Promote Effective Youth Development and 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>>.