

# Caution

This presentation has disturbing violent content, including a school shooting and discussion of threat assessment to prevent violence. You have permission to excuse yourself from any portion of this class.

# ***Why we need school threat assessment and how it works***

- 1. How prevalent are school shootings?**
- 2. Case example**
- 3. What is school threat assessment?**
- 4. How do we know it works?**

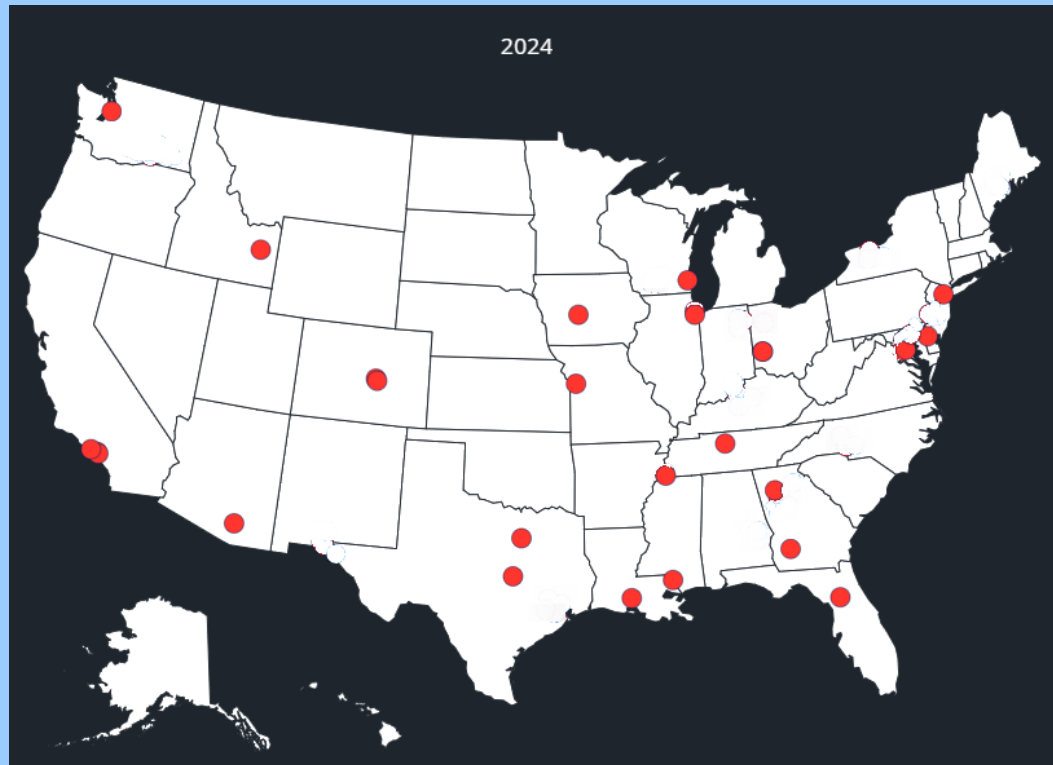
**Schools Respond to Surge of Threats After Georgia School Shooting**





MARJORIE STONEMAN DOUGLAS HIGH SCHOOL  
(2018-2019)

**All school shooting homicides must be prevented, but they are not as pervasive as it seems.**



**In 2024, 22 schools had a shooting homicide, but in a country with 130,000 schools, *the average school can expect a homicide every 5,909 years.* ( $130,000 \div 22$ )**

**Characteristics of School-Associated Youth Homicides —  
United States, 1994–2018**

Kristin M. Holland, PhD<sup>1</sup>; Jeffrey E. Hall, PhD<sup>2</sup>; Jing Wang, MD<sup>1</sup>; Elizabeth M. Gaylor, MPH<sup>1</sup>; Linda L. Johnson<sup>3</sup>; Daniel Shelby<sup>1</sup>;  
Thomas R. Simon, PhD<sup>1</sup>; School-Associated Violent Deaths Study Group<sup>1</sup>

# CDC Study of Youth Homicides at School

## What percentage of youth homicides occur at school?

A) 50%

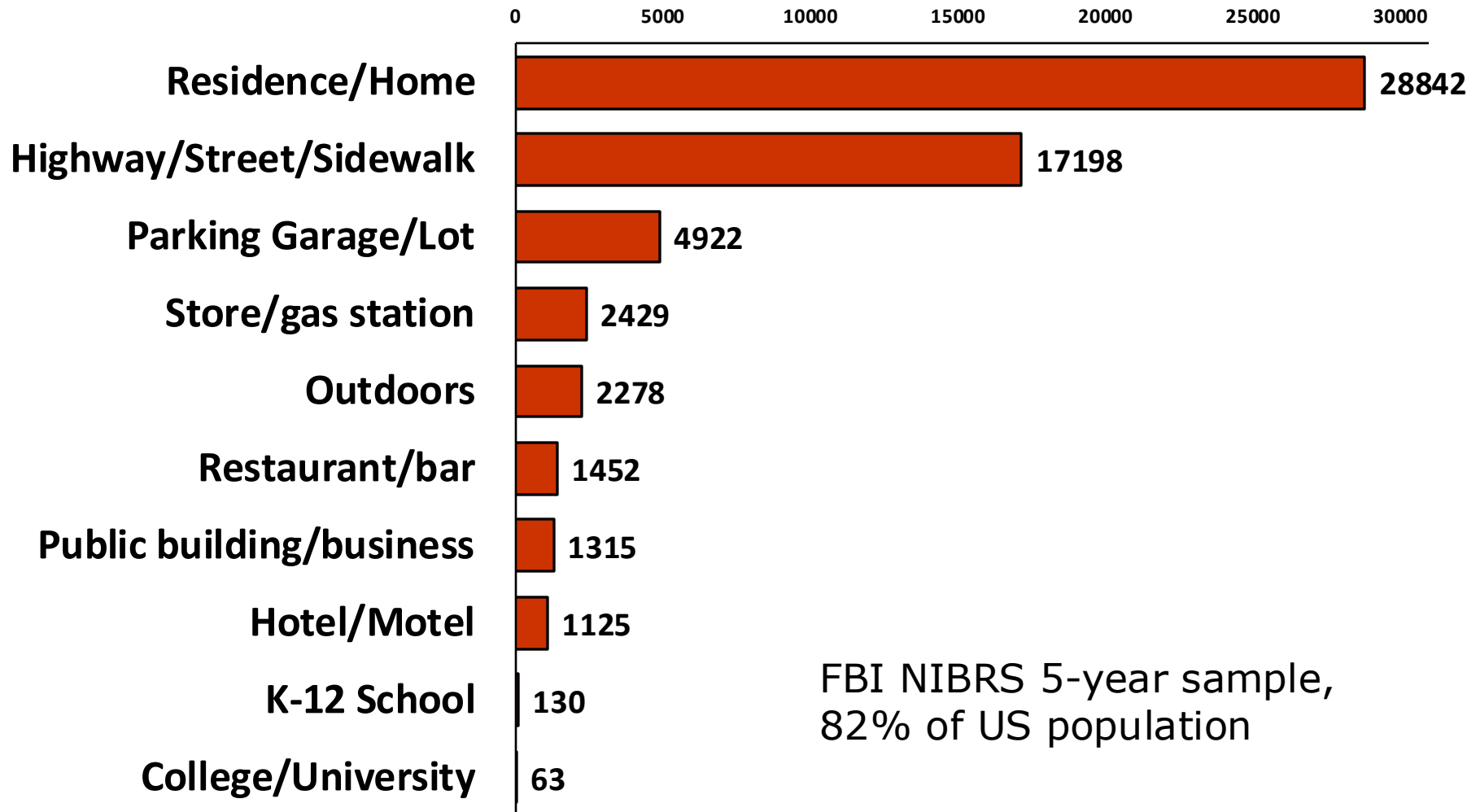
B) 10%

✓ C) 2%

A youth is 50x more likely to  
be killed outside of school  
than at school.

**Youth means school-age, 5-18**

# Selected Locations of 59,754 Homicides



Source: FBI National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) database for 5 years ending 2024.

<https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/crime-trend>

# Annual Gun Toll

36,000 deaths

63,000 injuries

100,000 total



# 274



## Shootings per day

Shooting deaths from: CDC National Vital Statistics

[http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/dataRestriction\\_inj.html](http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/dataRestriction_inj.html)

Shooting injuries from: <http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/nfirates2001.html>





The U.S. is flooded with gun violence.





Floods spread everywhere.



A school flood would not panic community leaders into believing that schools are dangerous places. We do not sandbag our schools or stock them with life preservers.

# ***Why we need school threat assessment and how it works***

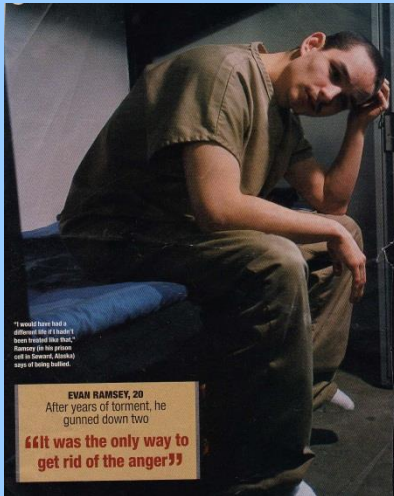
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# Bullying motivated many of the school shootings



**EVAN RAMSEY, 20**  
After years of torment, he  
gunned down two  
“It was the only way to  
get rid of the anger”

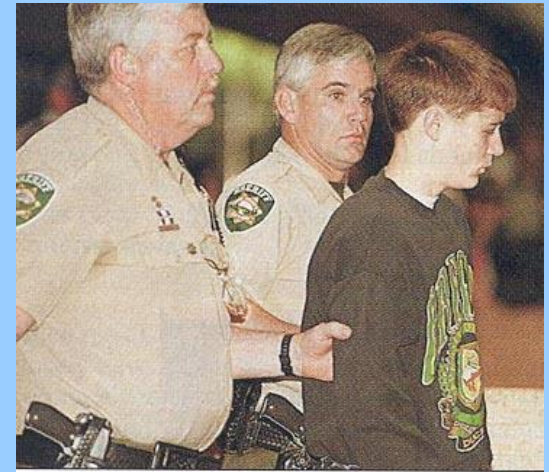


of a culture that rewards perceived strength and dominance. “The concept of power we admire is power over someone else,” says Jackson Katz, 41, whose Long Beach Calif., consulting firm counsels schools and the military on violence prevention. “In corporate culture, in sport culture, in the media, we honor those who win at all cost. The bully is a kind of hero in our society.” Perhaps no surprisingly, most bullies are male. “Our culture defines masculinity as connected to power, control and dominance,” notes Katz, whose work was inspired in part by the shame he felt in high school when he once stood idly by while a bully beat up a smaller student.

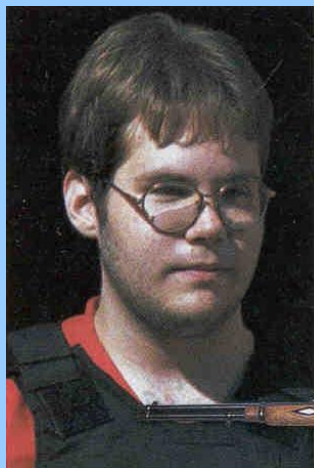
As for the targets of bullying, alienation runs like a stink through most of their lives. A study last fall by the U.S. Secret Service found that in two-thirds of the 37 school shootings since 1974, the attackers felt “persecuted, bullies threatened, attacked or injured.” In more than three-quarters of the cases, the attacker told a peer of his violent intentions. William Pollack, a clinical psychologist and author

**‘ANDY’ WILLIAMS, 15**  
Taunting sent him on  
a fatal rampage  
**“We abused him pretty  
much, I mean verbally”**  
—a Santee, Calif., teenager

PEOPLE 6/4/01 5



**Kipland Kinkel being taken to his arraignment**



## Pearl, Miss. OCT. 1, 1997

“The world has wronged me, and I couldn’t take it anymore,” said **LUKE WOODHAM, 16**, at the end of his rampage through town and school. Woodham has been charged as an adult in the deaths of his mother and two classmates, apparently part of a larger conspiracy. Seven other boys were later arrested

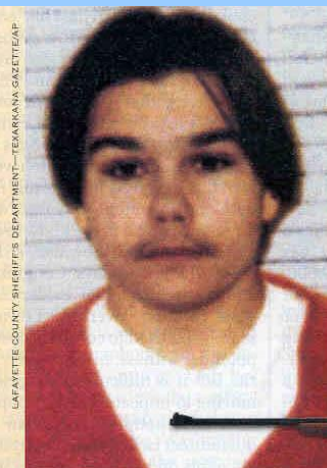
■ A .30-.30-cal. rifle was used



## West Paducah, Ky. DEC. 1, 1997

Three girls were killed when **MICHAEL CARNEAL, 14**, opened fire on a prayer meeting that had assembled in school just before the start of classes. He had warned a classmate that “something big” would happen. When a friend pushed him to a wall to stop the rampage, Carneal said, “Kill me, please. I can’t believe I did that.” He faces trial as an adult

■ A .22-cal. Ruger pistol was used



## Stamps, Ark. DEC. 15, 1997

Eighth-grader **JOSEPH (“COLT”) TODD, 14**, is accused of randomly shooting two schoolmates. The local sheriff said Todd had been bullied by other classmates and had had enough: “It didn’t matter who walked on campus. He was just intending to inflict pain on somebody.” Todd has been charged as an adult

■ A .22-cal. rifle was used



LAFAYETTE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT—TEKAMARCA GAZETTE/AP



## Middle School Bullying

- Gossip column in school newspaper says he and his best friend John have “feelings for one another”
- Called “gay boy”
- Shoved, spit upon
- Pants pulled down





# High School Bullying

- Teasing continues in high school, food taken at lunch, lab work ruined in class
- Band teacher permits further harassment as traditional “initiation”
- Gym teacher makes him play basketball with the girls



## **Deterioration under Stress of Bullying**

- He becomes depressed and suicidal, cuts himself
- Joins an outcast group known as “the freaks”
- These boys plot revenge and discuss “shooting up the school”
- Becomes paranoid, hears voices taunting him and urging him to take revenge



**Leonardo DiCaprio  
school shooting in  
The Basketball Diaries**

## Movie Inspiration

- Joins an outcast group known as “the freaks”
- The boys are inspired by a movie in which a boy takes revenge on bullies
- The boys plot revenge and discuss “shooting up the school”





## West Paducah, Ky.

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Three girls were killed when **MICHAEL CARNEAL**, 14, opened fire on a prayer meeting that had assembled in school just before

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# Three students killed, 5 wounded in shooting



Attendants moved one of the students hurt in yesterday's shooting at Heath High School to an ambulance. A 14-year-old freshman was arrested and charged in the deaths of three students. Five others were wounded at the school west of Paducah.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

## McCracken police: Boy, 14, opened fire on prayer circle

By JAMES MALONE  
The Courier-Journal

HEATH, Ky. — A freshman strolled into the lobby of Heath High School yesterday morning, calmly pulled a pistol from his backpack and opened fire as a student prayer circle was disbanding, police and witnesses said.

In less than two minutes, eight students had been shot — three fatally.

The 14-year-old shooting suspect, who took the time to put in ear plugs before opening fire, had warned classmates last week that "something big is going to happen," said the high school's principal, Bill Bond. But the students didn't take the boy seriously and did not report the remarks to school officials. No motive has been determined.

After the shooting, authorities found the youth had brought four more guns with him and more than 600 rounds of am-



**Michael Carneal**  
was arrested  
after the  
shootings at



# Carneal pleads guilty in shootings



PHOTOS BY JAMES H. WALLACE, THE COURIER-JOURNAL

An officer led Michael Carneal, left, to a police car waiting outside the McCracken County Courthouse after Carneal pleaded guilty but mentally ill in the murder of three students in a shooting at Heath High School.



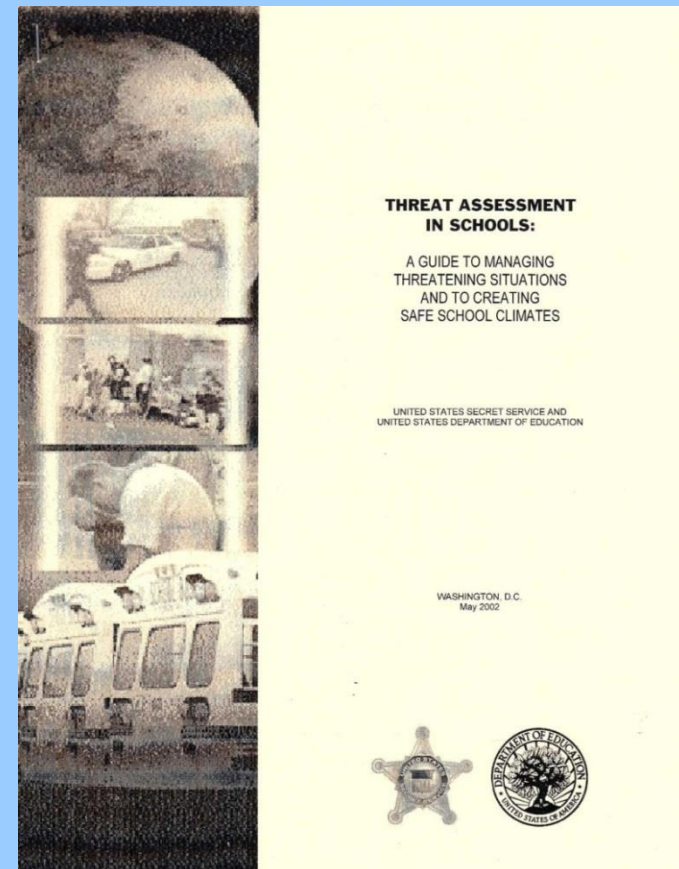
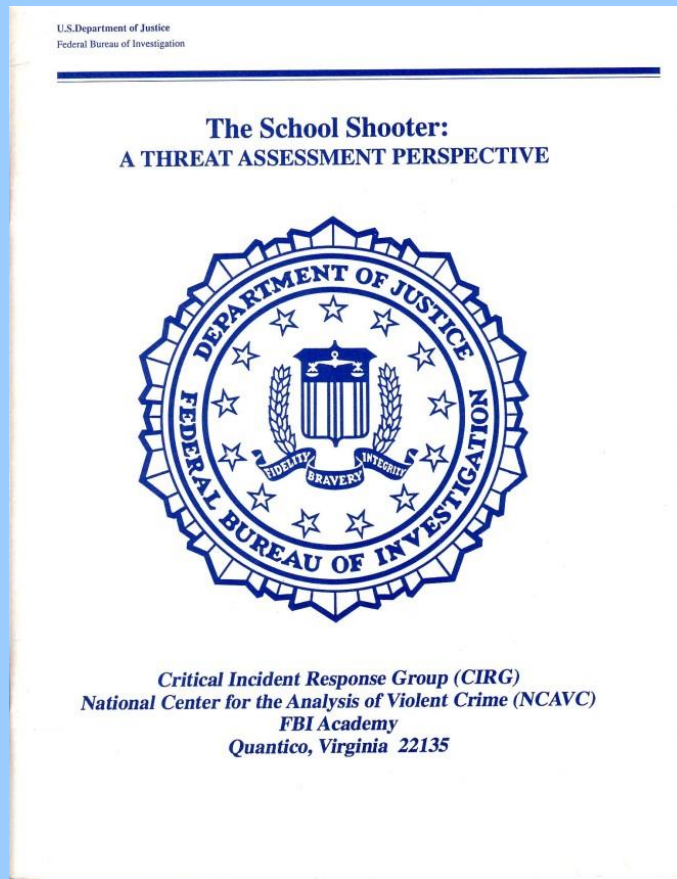
# **Prevention Opportunities**

**Bullying  
Mental Illness  
Peer Influences  
Access to guns**

**No one reported  
his threats**



# The FBI, Secret Service, and Dept of Education recommended a threat assessment approach more than 20 years ago.



# ***Why we need school threat assessment and how it works***

1. How prevalent are school shootings?
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# **What is behavioral threat assessment and management?**

**BTAM is a problem-solving approach to violence prevention that involves assessment and intervention with students who have threatened violence in words or behavior.**



# **Threat assessment is a problem-solving approach to violence prevention**

We can reduce the risk of violence by identifying the problem, need, or conflict underlying a threat and helping the individual to find a non-violent resolution.



# 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 gathers information to evaluate 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.



# **Threat Assessment**

## **Threat Assessment in Schools**

# **School-Based Threat Assessment**

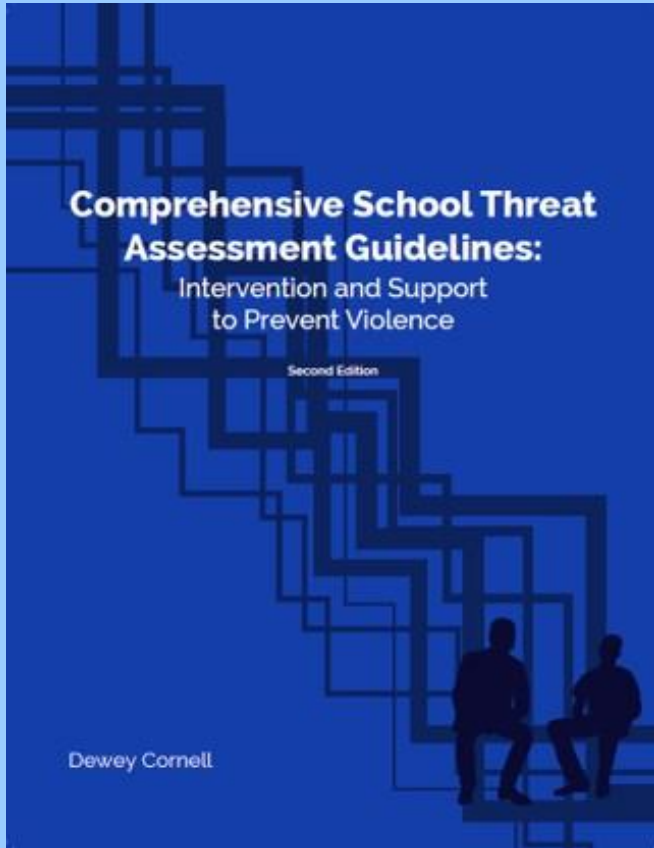
1. Compared to adults, students
  - frequently make threats;
  - often engage in fights;
2. Over-reactions to student misbehavior have serious negative consequences.
3. Schools have a duty to educate all students.

# **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.



# Virginia Model of School Threat Assessment



- **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**

**2024 2<sup>nd</sup> edition**

# Continuum of Threats

Substantive

- Warning of impending violence
- Attempts to intimidate or frighten
- Thrill of causing a disruption
- Attention-seeking, boasting
- Fleeting expressions of anger
- Jokes
- Figures of speech

Transient

# Two groups of students who make threats



# Many reasons why students make threats



Angry  
Frustrated  
Wanting to fight  
Joking  
Seeking attention  
Falsely reported



# Over-Reaction

School Suspends Second Grader for Eating His Pop-Tart Into the Shape of a Gun



# Threat Assessment Steers Between 2 Errors



## **Overreaction**

Excessive punishment for a threat that is not serious

## **Underreaction**

Failing to prevent a serious threat.



### **Step 1. Evaluate the threat.**

Obtain a detailed account of the threat, usually by interviewing the person who made the threat, the intended victim, and other witnesses. Write the exact content of the threat and key observations by each party. Consider the circumstances in which the threat was made and the student's intentions. Is there communication of intent to harm someone or behavior suggesting intent to harm?

**No**

**Not a threat.** Might be expression of anger that merits attention.

**Yes** ↓

### **Step 2. Attempt to resolve the threat as transient.**

Attempt to resolve conflict or threat.

Is the threat an expression of humor, rhetoric, anger, or frustration that can be resolved so that there is no intent to harm?

**Yes**

**Case resolved as transient.**  
Add services as needed.

**No** ↓

### **Step 3. Respond to a substantive threat.**

For all substantive threats:

- a. Take immediate precautions to protect potential victims.
- b. Warn intended victim and parents.
- c. Look for ways to resolve conflict.
- d. Discipline student, when time is appropriate.

Serious means a threat to hit, fight, or beat up whereas

Very serious means a threat to kill, rape, or cause very serious injury with a weapon.

**Serious**

**Case resolved as serious substantive threat.** Add services as needed.

**Very Serious** ↓

### **Step 4. Conduct a safety evaluation for a very serious substantive threat.**

In addition to a-d above, the student may be briefly placed elsewhere or suspended pending completion of the following:

- e. Screen student for mental health services and counseling; refer as needed.
- f. Law enforcement investigation.
- g. Develop safety plan that reduces risk and addresses student needs. Plan should include review of Individual Educational Plan or "child find" procedures if appropriate.



### **Step 5. Implement and monitor the safety plan.**

Document the plan.

Maintain contact with the student.

Revise plan as needed.

# 4 Categories

## Criteria

**No threat**

False rumor

**Transient threat**

Expression of anger or frustration easily resolved, no intent to attack

**Serious  
Substantive Threat**

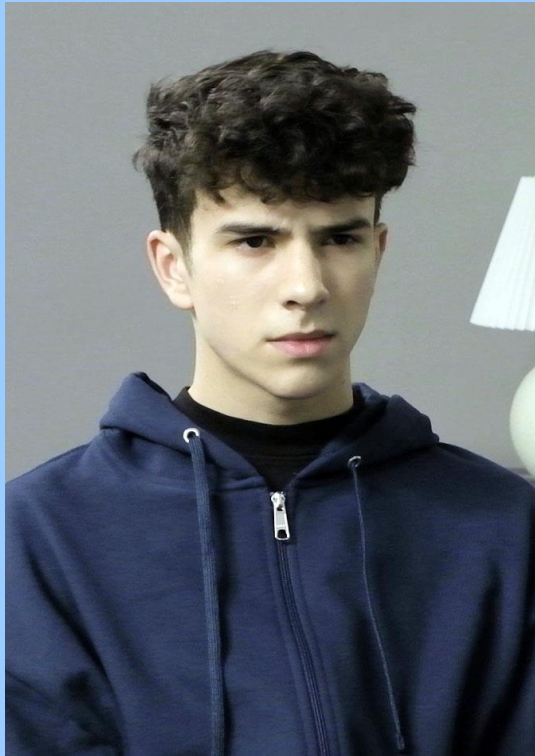
Intent to fight

**Very Serious  
Substantive Threat**

Intent to shoot, stab, kill, or severely injure



# Jay



Two students reported to a teacher that a student in the cafeteria named Jay said that he is going to become a serial killer. The students are worried that he plans an attack on the school.

You interview Jay in your office.

# Version 1

# Jay - 1



Jay was just talking about the costume he was going to wear for Halloween. He didn't threaten anyone, and his comments were misunderstood by two students who only heard a fragment of the conversation.

How would you classify this threat?

- a) Not a threat
- b) Transient threat
- c) Serious substantive threat
- d) Very serious substantive threat

### Step 1. Evaluate the threat.

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### Step 5. Implement and monitor the safety plan.

Document the plan.

Maintain contact with the student.

Revise plan as needed.



# Jay - 2

Now let's try a different version of this situation.



# Version 2

# Jay - 2



Now Jay says that he was frustrated that a friend was teasing him, and he thought it would shut him up if he said he was going to become a serial killer. He got the idea because they just saw a movie involving a serial killer. He did not realize it would upset everyone. He has no interest in killing anyone and he is sorry he said that. The witnesses corroborate Jay's account. If there is no other information to contradict this explanation, how would you classify this threat?

- a) Not a threat
- b) Transient threat
- c) Serious substantive threat
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### Step 1. Evaluate the threat.

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Yes

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No ↓

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### Step 5. Implement and monitor the safety plan.

Document the plan.

Maintain contact with the student.

Revise plan as needed.



# Jay - 3

Now let's change the situation again.



# Version 3

# Jay - 3



Now Jay says that he is not getting along with another boy named Leon. Leon has been picking on him and he thought it would shut him up if he said he was going to become a serial killer. He says it didn't work, and he has no intent to kill anyone, but he realizes he is probably going to have to fight Leon to settle the matter. He says they will probably have a fight after school so that he will not be suspended for fighting. If there is no other information to contradict this explanation, how would you classify this threat?

- a) Not a threat
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Revise plan as needed.



# Jay - 4

One final variation.



# Jay - 4



One final variation. Jay denies saying anything about a serial killer. However, other students tell us that Jay is upset over being bullied by some older boys. One student said that Jay asked where he could obtain a handgun. Jay posted some photos of serial killers on Instagram. How would you classify this threat?

- a) Not a threat
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# **In very serious substantive cases, the team conducts a safety evaluation leading to a safety plan.**

## **1. Safety interviews with:**

- Student
- Intended victim/witnesses
- Student's parent
- School staff who know student (including SRO, school counselor, teachers)
- Outside professionals who know student

## **2. Law Enforcement investigation**

# Safety Interview

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- Not a prediction model.
- Identify any mental health needs.
- Identify reasons why threat was made.
- Propose strategies for reducing risk.





# Law Enforcement Investigation of Very Serious Substantive Threats

- Interview suspects and witnesses.
- Conduct searches for weapons and other evidence of planning.
- Serve as a resource for students with fears or information to share.
- Take appropriate protective action.



If you have about 30-40 minutes, you could use the case involving Mason, a boy on the autism spectrum who threatened to kill a classmate. This is the final case in Level 1 and it shows interviews and team meetings, and an intervention at the end. You can drop slides about confidentiality/FERPA not relevant to Brazil. This case could be present before or after the research section. It might make a nice closing after the research.

(You will flinch at the acting, but I can explain why we did not do additional takes to make it better.)

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1. How prevalent are school shootings?
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# **How do we know that CSTAG works?**

- **It sounds good?**
- **Experts endorse it?**
- **You had a positive experience using it?**

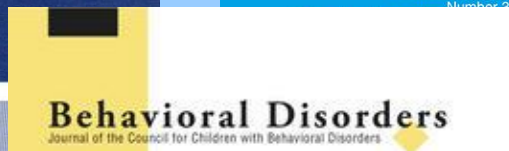
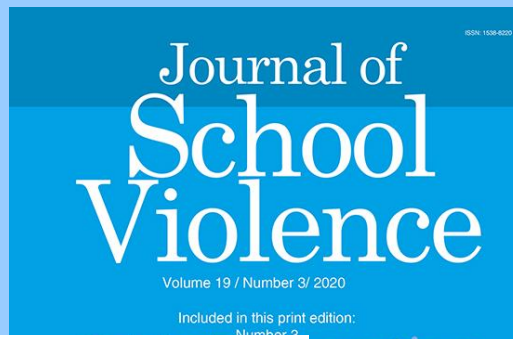
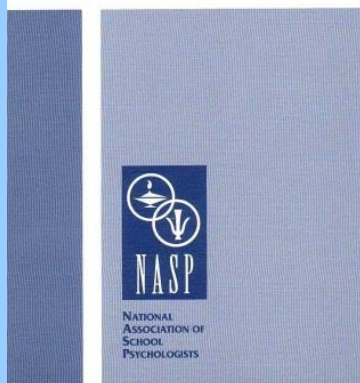
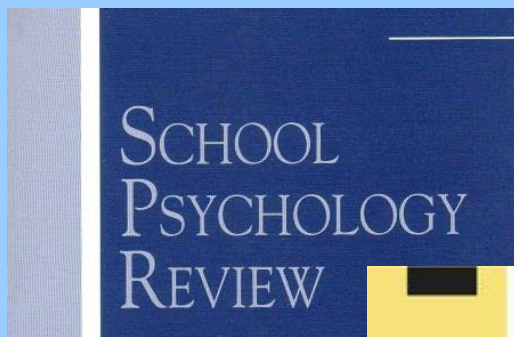
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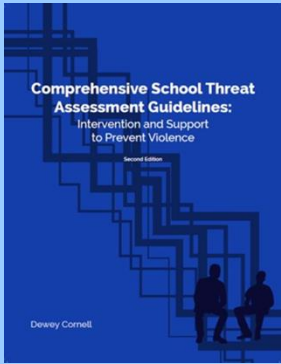
# **How do we know that CSTAG works?**

**An evidence-based practice is one that has been tested with scientific studies demonstrating that it works.**



# Research on Threat Assessment

1. Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Kaplan, S., McConville, D., Douglass, J., Elkon, A., McKnight, L., Branson, C., & Cole, J. (2004). Guidelines for student threat assessment: Field-test findings. *School Psychology Review*, 33, 527-546.
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3. Strong, K., & Cornell, D. (2008). Student threat assessment in Memphis City Schools: A descriptive report. *Behavioral Disorders*, 34, 42-54.
4. Allen, K., Cornell, D., Lorek, E., & Sheras, P. (2008). Response of school personnel to student threat assessment training. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 19, 319-332.
5. Cornell, D., Sheras, P., Gregory, A., & Fan, X. (2009). A retrospective study of school safety conditions in high schools using the Virginia Threat Assessment Guidelines versus alternative approaches. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 24, 119-129. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0016182>
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# CSTAG Research

- 1. Field-tests** - Virginia and Memphis
- 2. Training evaluations** – Virginia, Florida, National
- 3. Controlled studies** - 6 in Virginia
- 4. Large-scale implementation** - Virginia and Florida
- 5. Fidelity, consistency, long-term outcomes** -  
Current 3-year study of about 500 schools in 6 states

# Safety Outcomes

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



# Student Outcomes

1. Most students receive support services such as counseling.
2. Most students remain in their school.
3. Suspension rates decline.
4. Racial disparities in suspension diminished or not present.
5. Few students are subject to arrest, court charges, or incarceration.

# What can you expect?

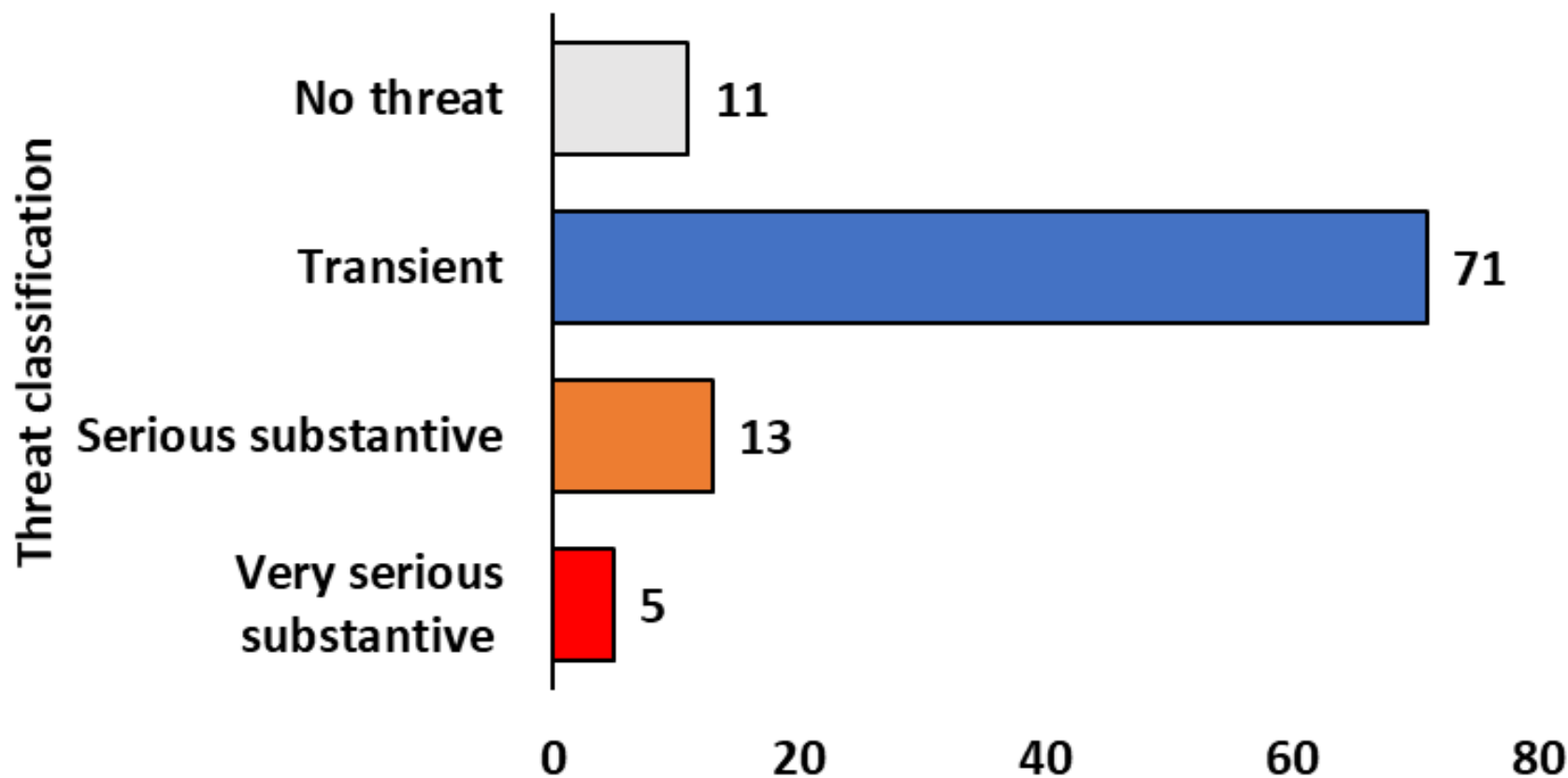
## Results from a Florida Statewide Implementation



- Statewide training and implementation following Parkland shooting
- Data from 60 of 67 Florida districts
- 3,400 schools
- 23,000 threat cases (2021-2022 AY)

See technical report from University of Virginia Youth Violence Project for more information. <https://education.virginia.edu/yvp>

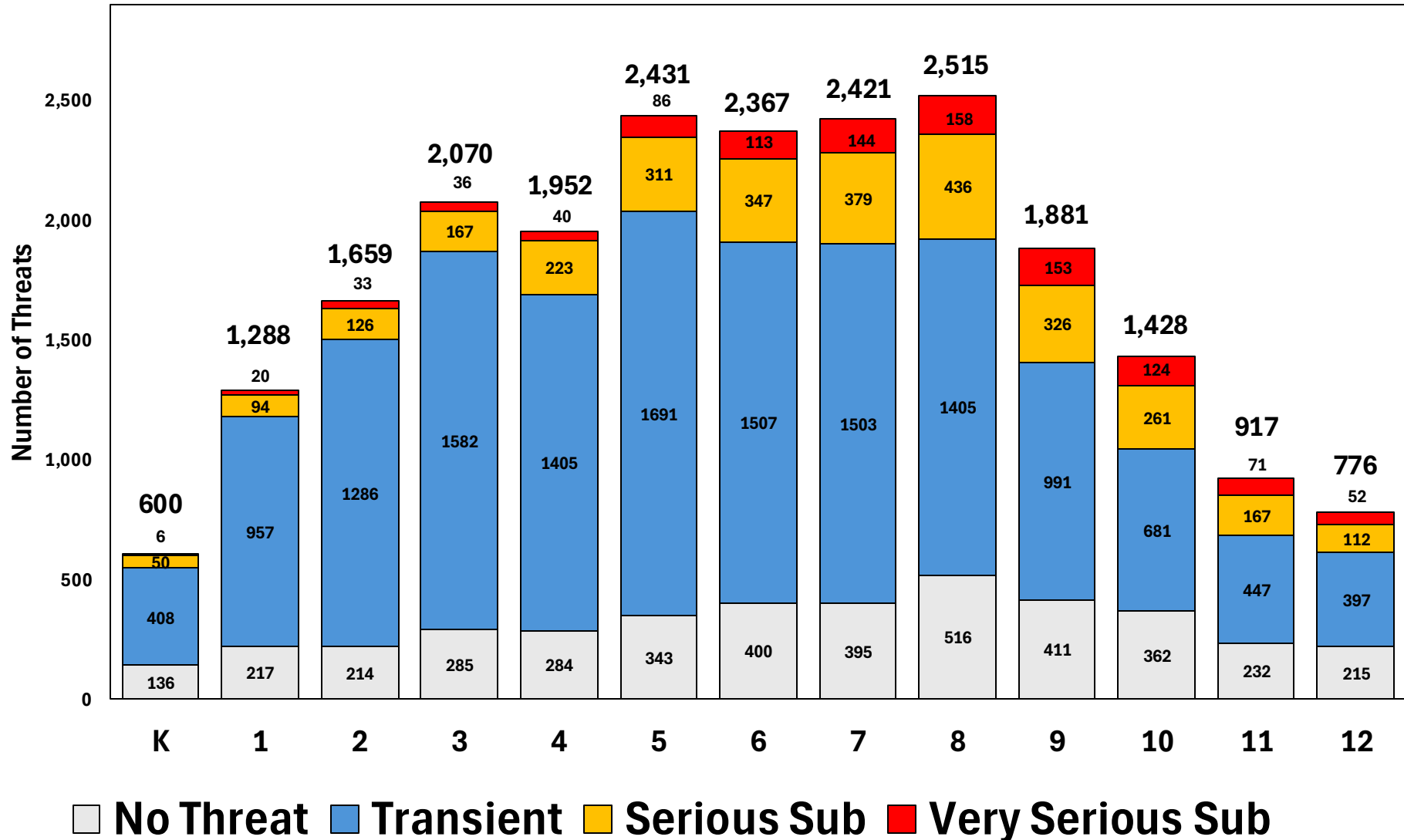
## Classification of 22,929 Threat Cases (%)



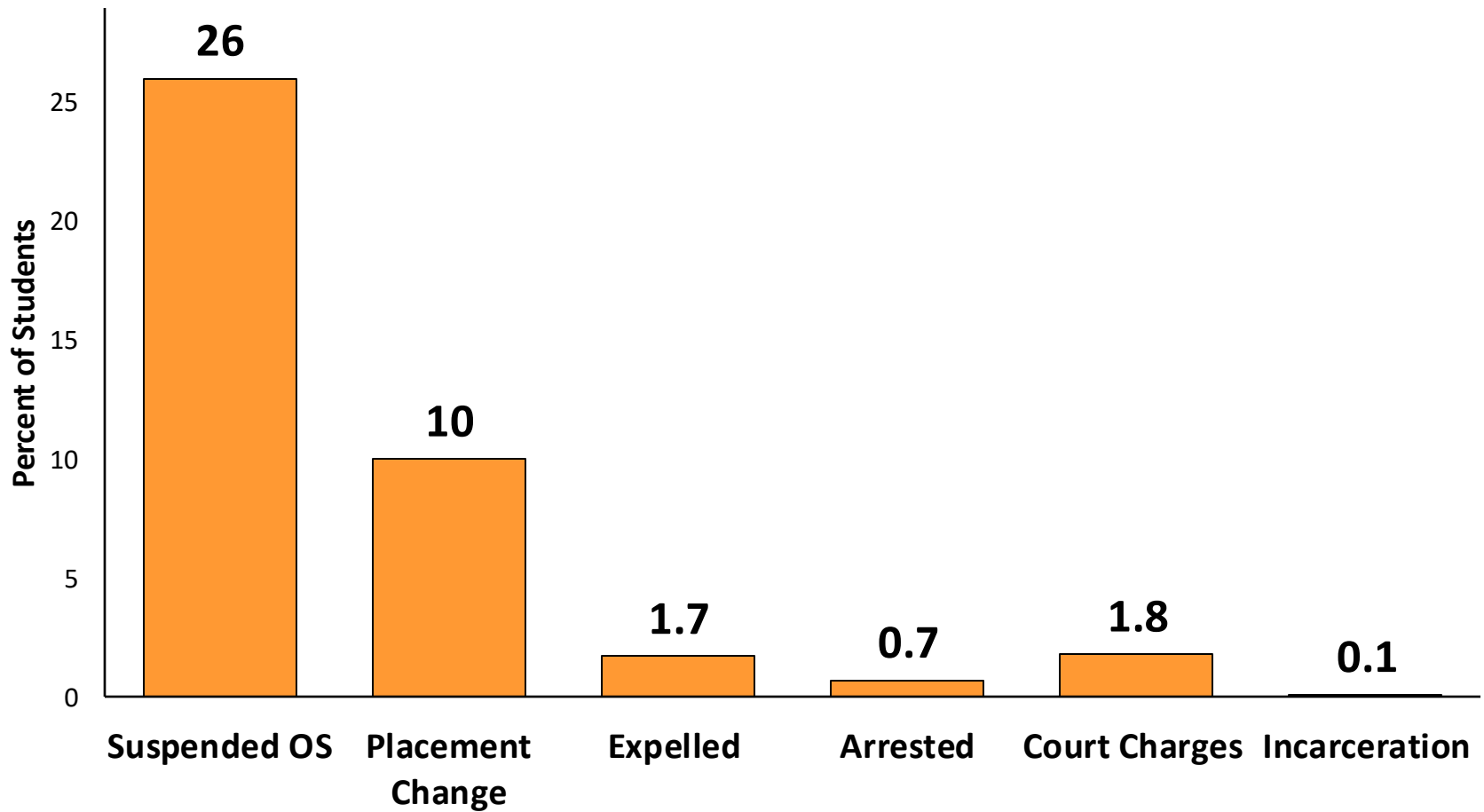
Florida statewide sample of 3,400 schools (Maeng et al., 2023)

# Threat Classification for Florida Grades K-12

N = 22,307



# Florida Disciplinary and Legal Outcomes (n = 23,134)



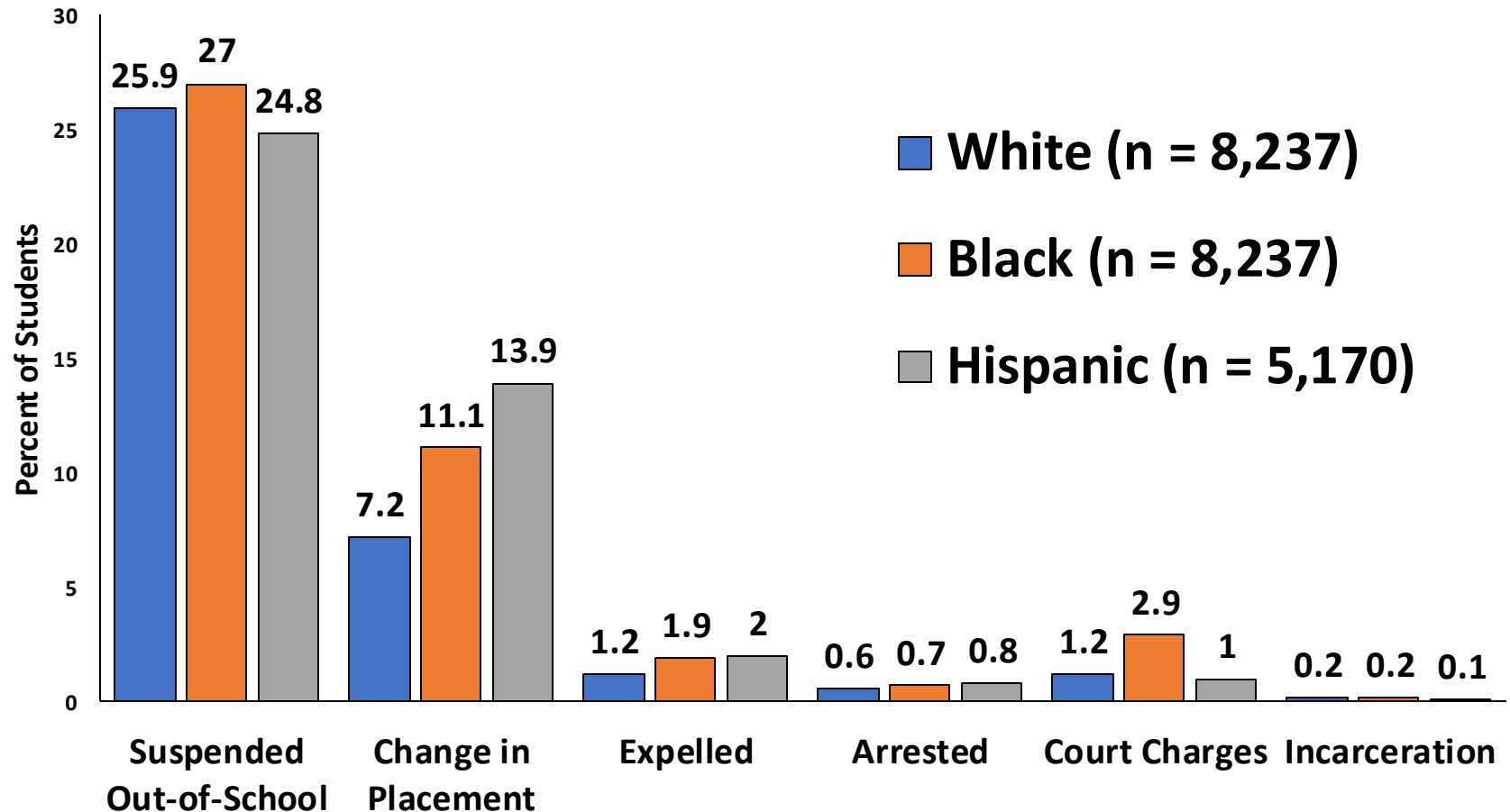
**Florida 2021-2022 school year.**



# 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.

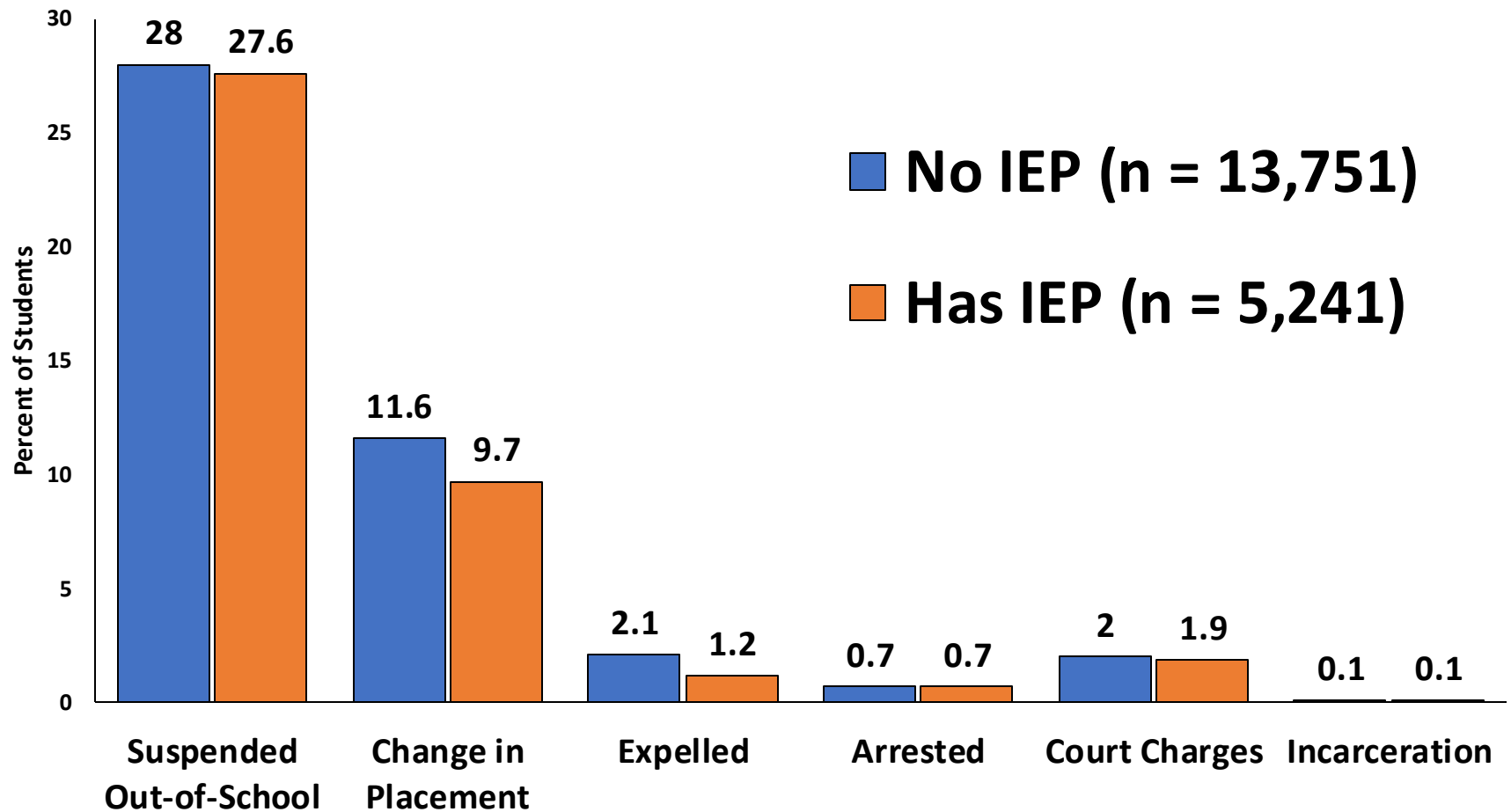
## Disciplinary and Legal Outcomes by Race/ Ethnicity (n = 21,644)



Florida technical report for 2021-2022 school year.

## Disciplinary and Legal Outcomes by IEP Status

(n = 18,992)



**Florida 2021-2022 school year.**

# Research Team



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