The Youth Violence Prevention Project was established in 1993. A series of workshops and courses on school safety were developed by Dewey Cornell, Ph.D. at the University of Virginia and these were followed by research, consultation, and additional trainings on various topics related to youth violence prevention. Since its inception, the Project has collaborated with many state agencies to create initiatives in prevention of bullying, youth gang prevention, suicide prevention, student threat assessment, and effective high school safety practices.

Over the years, the scope of training and research efforts has broadened considerably. For example, the Project offers full-day training in student threat assessment to K-12 school systems and to colleges. “We have provided student threat assessment training for thousands of schools in over one dozen states and several countries. Our methods have become well-recognized as a model approach to school violence prevention,” explains Dr. Cornell. Research, conducted in collaboration with several government agencies and school systems, is actively published in scientific journals and on the Project website.

For example, a recent high school safety study examined school climate conditions in 93% of Virginia's public high schools. The study allowed identification of school safety practices associated with lower levels of student and teacher victimization as well as higher academic achievement and higher graduation rates.
Rather than taking a punitive approach guided by “zero tolerance” discipline, the Virginia model for student threat assessment allows administrators and others to decide how serious an incident is and respond accordingly through a problem-solving process. “We do not need to suspend thousands of students from school each year for zero tolerance violations that are not truly dangerous,” explains Dr. Cornell.

Dr. Cornell summarizes the current efforts. “Throughout our various projects, we have remained focused on practical, effective strategies for the assessment and prevention of aggressive and violent behavior, especially in schools. Our work is not specifically for teachers, but rather for all school personnel, including administrators, psychologists and school counselors, social workers, school resource officers, and other human services professionals. We have been active in advising policymakers and advocating best practices in state and federal meetings and hearings, and through information disseminated through the news media.”

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