

ABC NEWS/GOOD MORNING AMERICA POLL – 3/11/01
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Students on School Violence: Could it Happen Here?

A third of high school students can think of a classmate who may be troubled enough to stage a violent attack in their school – yet fewer than half have ever had a special class or discussion group that told them how to report a threat of school violence.

More than a third also say they've heard a classmate threaten to kill someone – but most of them didn't take it seriously or report it to an adult. One in eight say they personally know a student who's brought a gun to school, and one in 10 say they've heard of a plan by one or more students at their school to shoot or kill classmates.

At the same time, hardly over half, 54 percent, say they've had a class, special program or discussion group on the subject of school violence. And just 46 percent have been taught in such a class what to do if they hear a threat or think another student is armed.

On the positive side, this ABC News/Good Morning America poll also finds that most students feel safe, and that their concerns are no worse – and in some cases better – than they were after the April 1999 shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo. At that time, for instance, 40 percent saw some likelihood of a violent attack at their own school; now it's 29 percent.

The poll will be aired on ABC's Good Morning America on Wednesday morning, March 14, with a Town Hall Meeting on school violence to air Thursday morning, March 15.

BULLIED – Charles Andrew Williams, accused of killing two students and wounding 13 last week in Santee, Calif., reportedly had been a target of bullying at his school. And this poll finds that when students think of a potentially violent classmate, it's generally a boy who comes to mind, and one who's been bullied by others, rather than a bully himself.

Thirty-three percent say they can think of a fellow student "who may be troubled enough to try something like this." That's down a bit from 40 percent in 1999.

Seven in 10 say the potential attacker they can think of is a boy, and 29 percent think of both boys and girls; just two percent have only a girl in mind. Three-quarters say it's more likely to be a person who gets picked on than one who picks on others.

	3/11/01	4/25/99
Know student who might attack	33%	40
Heard a student threaten to kill	35	32
See some risk of an attack	29	40
Know a student who brought a gun to school	13	20

Heard a plan to kill students	9	na
Attended a class on school violence	54%	na
Had instruction on reporting threats	46	na

Relatively few students, 13 percent, say they personally are picked on at school.

CONCERNS – Despite the Santee shooting and another two days later in Williamsport, Pa., students are taking the issue in stride. Now as in 1999, nine in 10 say they feel personally safe at their school, and more than three-quarters say violence is not a serious problem there.

There's evidence, moreover, of fewer guns in school, and less access to guns. While 13 percent of students personally know a student who's brought a gun to school, it was 20 percent two years ago. And while 44 percent say it would be easy for them personally to get a gun, that's down from 54 percent in 1999.

Risk, of course, never reaches zero. Among the vast majority of students who haven't seen a gun in school, nine in 10 say they'd report it if it happened. But a few – seven percent – say they would not report it.

Similarly, just five percent call violence a "very serious" problem at their school (another 16 percent call it "somewhat serious") and just seven percent feel personally unsafe at school. But while small percentages, these represent hundreds of thousands of students.

SECURITY – Most students report security measures in place at their schools, and nearly two-thirds think their schools are doing enough to try to prevent violence there. On one hand that's up from 57 percent in 1999; on the other, it leaves a third of high schoolers who think their schools still aren't doing enough to protect them.

Counseling for troubled students is the most prevalent line of deterrence; 87 percent say their school offers it. Sixty-seven percent say there are police officers or armed security guards at their school, and 63 percent say the school tries to identify troubled students who may be prone to violence. About half report random searches of lockers; four in 10, security cameras in the hallways; three in 10, random searches of students. Seven percent report metal detectors at school entrances.

	3/11/01	4/25/99
Provide good counseling	87%	88
Police/armed guards	67	61
Identify violent students	63	55
Random locker searches	51	51
Security cameras	41	na
Random student searches	31	25
Metal detectors	7	5

GROUPS – Two factors seem to influence students' perceptions of threat at their schools: The size of the school, and the age of the student. Older students, and those in smaller schools, are less apt to feel threatened.

Fifty-eight percent of teen-agers attending small high schools feel "very safe" from violence, compared to 46 percent of those attending large schools. Similarly, in small schools just 12 percent call violence a serious problem; in larger schools it's 23 percent.

Interestingly, while students in larger schools are less apt to feel safe, these are the same schools that are more likely to have police or armed security guards on patrol. Among students in larger schools, 84 percent say they have guards; in small schools it's just 43 percent. Larger schools – and the presence of guards – are more prevalent in the West.

In rural schools, which tend to be smaller, 54 percent of students feel very safe, compared to 49 percent in suburban schools and 41 percent in city schools. While rural schools are less likely to have guards, they're more likely to conduct random searches of student lockers. Sixty-one percent in rural schools say this happens, compared to fewer than half in city or suburban schools.

	School Size		
	<500	501-1,000	>1,000
Feel very safe	58%	42	48
Violence a serious problem	12	26	22
Have police/armed guards	43	63	84

Girls are more likely than boys to think their schools should be doing more to deter violence; 41 percent of girls think so, compared to 28 percent of boys. But in other gauges, including personal feelings of safety, there's no real difference between the sexes.

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News poll was conducted by telephone March 8-11, 2001, among a random national sample of 500 high school students. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Field work by ICR- International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet, at:
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/PollVault/PollVault.html>

Here are the full results:

*= less than 0.5 percent

1. In your opinion, is violence at your high school a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious or not much of a problem at all?

-----Serious-----	-----Not serious-----	No
NET Very Smwht	NET Not too Not at all	opin.

3/11/01	21	5	16	79	31	48	*
4/25/99	23	5	18	77	29	49	0

2. Would you say you personally feel very safe from violence at your school, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?

	-----Safe-----			-----Unsafe----			No opin.
	NET	Very	Smwht	NET	Smwht	Very	
3/11/01	93	48	44	7	5	2	*
4/25/99	88	42	47	11	9	2	*

3. How would you rate the security precautions that your school has in place to try to prevent violence there? Would you say the security at your school is excellent, good, not so good or poor?

	----Exc/Good----			----Not good/poor----			No opin.
	NET	Exc	Good	NET	Not good	Poor	
3/11/01	75	14	61	24	19	6	1
4/25/99	70	12	59	29	19	10	*

4. Do you think your school is doing enough to try to prevent violence there, or should it be doing more?

	Doing enough	Should do more	No opinion
3/11/01	64	34	2
4/25/99	57	42	1

5. As you may know, some students have shot and killed or wounded other students at some schools recently. What's the chance this kind of thing could happen at your school - would you say it's very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely?

	-----Likely-----			-----Unlikely----			No opin.
	NET	Very	Smwht	NET	Smwht	Very	
3/11/01	29	6	23	69	34	35	2
4/25/99*	40	9	31	58	29	29	2

* "two students shot and killed several people at a high school in Littleton, Colorado this week."

6. Can you think of any students at your own school who you think might be troubled enough to do something like this?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/11/01	33	63	4
4/25/99	40	59	2

6a. Are you thinking of one or more (girls), one or more (boys), or both (girls) and (boys)?

	Girls	Boys	Both	No opinion
3/11/01	2	68	29	1

6b. Are the kids you're thinking of more likely to be (bullies who pick on other kids), more likely to be (kids who get picked on), or what?

	Bullies	Kids who get picked on	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opin.
3/11/01	10	76	11	2	1

8. I'm going to name a few things your school might or might not do in an effort to prevent violence there. (First/next) is (read item). As far as you know, is that something your school does or does not do?

a. Try to identify troubled students who may be prone to violence

	Does	Does not	No opinion
3/11/01	63	26	11
4/25/99	55	32	13

b. Have metal detectors at school entrances

	Does	Does not	No opinion
3/11/01	7	93	1
4/25/99	5	94	1

c. Conduct random searches of students' lockers

	Does	Does not	No opinion
3/11/01	51	44	5
4/25/99	51	46	3

d. Conduct random searches of students themselves

	Does	Does not	No opinion
3/11/01	31	64	6
4/25/99	25	72	3

e. Have police officers or armed security guards on patrol at the school

	Does	Does not	No opinion
3/11/01	67	31	2
4/25/99	61	38	1

f. Offer effective counseling and other assistance to troubled students

	Does	Does not	No opinion
3/11/01	87	8	4
4/25/99	88	10	2

g. Have security cameras in hallways and other areas

	Does	Does not	No opinion
3/11/01	41	55	5

10. Do you personally know any students who have ever brought a gun to your school, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/11/01	13	86	*
4/25/99	20	79	1

10a. (IF YES) Did you report it to a teacher or some other adult, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/11/01	Insufficient sample size		
4/25/99	16	83	1

10c. (IF NO in Q10.) If you did know a student who brought a gun to school, do you think you would report it to a teacher or some other adult, or not?
(Not asked of parents)

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/11/01	90	7	3
4/25/99	90	9	1

11. Have you ever heard a student at your school threaten to kill someone, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/11/01	35	64	1
4/25/99	32	67	1

11b. (IF HEARD THREAT/S) Did you take (it/them) seriously, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/11/01	26	73	2
4/25/99	27	72	1

11c. (IF HEARD THREAT/S) Did you report (it/them) to a teacher or some other adult, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/11/01	25	75	0
4/25/99	22	78	0

12. Has anyone at your high school ever threatened to kill you, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/11/01	5	95	0
4/25/99	5	95	0

13. How difficult or easy do you think it would be for you to get a gun?

	-----Easy-----			---Difficult---			Have gun (vol.)	No opin
	NET	Very	Smwht	NET	Smwht	Very		
3/11/01	44	22	21	51	22	30	3	1
4/25/99	54	31	23	45	23	22	0	1

14. Do you or does anyone in your house own a gun?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/33/01	44	55	2
4/25/99	47	52	1

15. Have you ever heard of a plan by a student or students at your school to shoot or kill other people at school, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/33/01	9	91	0

16. Have you had any classes, special programs or discussion groups in your school on the subject of school violence, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/11/01	54	43	3

17. Did that include information on what to do if you hear somebody make a threat or if you think they have a weapon, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/11/01	86	12	2

18. Now thinking of your own experiences at your school, do you personally get picked on by other students, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/11/01	13	87	*

END

