Today’s piece was prepared by Bridget Marvinsmith, MS4, based on a story from The Washington Post entitled “How does violence affect students’ school performance and behavior?” <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2012/12/21/security-guards-in-school-scared-students-unclear-effect-on-crime/>

In the wake of the Newtown, CT shooting and the ensuing national discussion on potential gun control legislation, there is much talk about what will “keep our children safe.” A generally held belief is that an increased amount or perception of safety at school correlates with improved achievement, behavior and mental health for children.

The journalist reports “kids feel less safe” with armed guards present at school (though later clarifies that this was only among the white students in the study cited). A School Psychologist adds, “We know that students who feel safe, supported, and connected in school (psychological safety) tend to have better social, behavioral, and academic outcomes.”

One recent somewhat related [research](http://www.sciencedirect.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/science/article/pii/S1054139X08002255) survey of middle- and high-school students found no association between exposure to various forms violence (including bullying, fights, gang conflicts and others --- school-based mass shootings per se were not part of the questionnaire) and self-reported academic achievement, but a higher risk factor for aggressive behavior, negative opinions of school, and school avoidance. Interestingly, hearing about violent acts from reliable third party sources was a higher risk factor for negative outcomes in some measures than direct victimization, and may reinforce bullying research (bullies, victims, and bully-victims representing 3 categories often considered).

As we consider the best way to achieve safe, nurturing learning environments for children, examining the evidence to date will be helpful in deciding what makes a school “safe.” This measure might be best represented by incorporating evidence of both successful violence reduction measures as well as student perceptions of safety.

The following resources may be useful:

**RESOURCES ON SCHOOL SAFETY & BULLYING:**

* School Safety Center *State of WA Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction*

<http://www.k12.wa.us/safetycenter/>

* Bullying resources *Hyperlinked through DBP website*

<https://depts.washington.edu/dbpeds/Resources.html#section4_textarea10_heading>

*Janosz M et al. Are There Detrimental Effects of Witnessing School Violence in Early Adolescence?, J Adolesc Health. 2008; 43(6):600-608.* [*http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X08002255*](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X08002255)

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!