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Public School Practices for Violence Prevention and Reduction: 2003–04

School violence can lead to a disruptive and threatening environment, physical injury, and emotional stress, all of which can be obstacles to student achievement (Elliott, Hamburg, and Williams 1998). Educators have responded to the perceived threat of school violence by implementing programs designed to prevent, deter, and respond to the potential for violence in schools (Peterson, Larson, and Skiba 2001). In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-110) emphasizes the importance of safe learning environments by requiring schools to have a safety plan in place and to fund programs and practices intended to prevent and reduce violence in schools.[1]

The needs and capabilities of schools may differ; thus, schools implement a variety of practices intended to prevent and reduce violence (Peterson, Larson, and Skiba 2001). However, little is known about the prevalence of school practices and the extent to which they vary according to school characteristics. This Issue Brief (1) examines principals' reports of the prevalence of formal practices in public schools designed to prevent or reduce school violence and (2) describes the distribution of these practices by selected school characteristics.

This analysis is based on school-level data reported by principals participating in the school year 2003–04 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), administered by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).[2] The estimates presented here complement those in the NCES report *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2006* (Dinkes et al. 2006), which reported on the safety and security measures taken by schools in school year 2003–04. In addition to including updated estimates, this analysis reports on additional safety and security practices, such as the use of security officers at public schools, and a variety of other approaches intended to prevent and reduce school violence.

There are many approaches designed to prevent and reduce violence in schools. However, this study examines (1) efforts to involve parents in preventing and reducing violence (2) safety and security procedures and (3) allowable disciplinary policies.[3] In addition to reporting the data by standard school characteristics, the study presents results by principals' self-reports of community crime.[4]

Prevalence of Violence Prevention and Reduction Practices

Among efforts to involve parents, 59 percent of schools formally obtained parental input on policies related to school crime and 50 percent provided parental training to deal with students' problem behaviors. In addition, 21 percent of schools involved parents at school to maintain discipline (table 1).[5]

For each of the following safety and security procedures examined, less than half of the schools used any one of the six procedures. Forty-five percent of schools had security officers or police present on a regular basis, 36 percent used one or more security cameras to monitor the school, 21 percent used dogs to conduct random drug checks, 14 percent required students to wear uniforms, 13 percent conducted random sweeps for contraband, and 6 percent performed random metal detector tests on students.

In terms of the three disciplinary policies examined, 68 percent of schools allowed out-of-school suspension with no curriculum or services provided, 67 percent allowed transfer to a specialized school for disciplinary reasons, and 51 percent allowed removal from school for at least the remainder of the year with no services.

Differences by School Characteristics

School level. Primary schools were more likely than high schools to provide training for parents to deal with students' problem behaviors (55 vs. 38 percent) or involve parents at school to maintain school discipline (24 vs. 17 percent) (table 1).

Four of the six safety and security measures were more common in high schools than in middle and primary schools. For example, a greater percentage of high schools than middle and primary schools used one or more security cameras to monitor the school (60 percent vs. 42 and 28 percent, respectively). In addition, a greater percentage of high schools than middle and primary schools had security officers or police present on a regular basis (72 percent vs. 64 and 34 percent, respectively).

Table 1. Percentage of public schools that reported using parental involvement, safety and security procedures, and disciplinary policies by school characteristics: 2003–04

School characteristic	School efforts to involve parents			Safety and security procedures						Allowable disciplinary policies		
	Formally obtain parental input on policies related to school crime	Provide training to help parents deal with students' problem behaviors	Involve parents at school to maintain school discipline	Perform one or more random metal detector checks on students	Use one or more random dog sniffs to check for drugs	Perform one or more random sweeps for contraband, not including dog sniffs[1]	Use one or more security cameras to monitor the school	Require students to wear uniforms	Security officers or police present on a regular basis	Out-of-school suspension with no curriculum or services provided	Transfer to a specialized school for disciplinary reasons[2]	Removal for at least the remainder of the year with no services
Total	**59**	**50**	**21**	**6**	**21**	**13**	**36**	**14**	**45**	**68**	**67**	**51**
Level[3]												
Primary	58	55	24	3	5	5	28	16	34	60	59	42
Middle	60	49	19	10	40	24	42	14	64	77	80	59
High school	59	38	17	13	59	28	60	4	72	85	82	70
Urbanicity												
City	61	60	31	12	11	14	33	29	51	65	67	47
Urban fringe[4]	63	52	20	3	16	9	41	12	46	66	67	46
Town	52	41	13	6	32	18	39	8	44	69	66	58
Rural	55	43	17	3	31	14	31	5	38	71	67	59
Crime level where students live[5]												
High	67	57	31	19	10	19	54	37	61	72	66	44
Moderate	59	54	26	9	20	16	36	28	53	71	69	54
Low	57	48	17	3	23	10	33	6	39	67	66	52
Mixed	63	54	25	7	21	15	40	14	50	66	70	50
Minority enrollment[6]												
Less than 5 percent	47	40	13	1	28	11	36	1	39	74	69	62
5 to 20 percent	57	49	16	2	24	10	37	4	41	66	66	53
20 to 50 percent	62	51	22	5	22	14	35	10	44	67	68	50
50 percent or more	67	57	30	12	13	15	34	35	52	65	65	42
50 percent or more Black	69	56	35	21	12	22	46	45	55	69	68	45
50 percent or more Hispanic	63	64	32	5	12	10	22	39	51	59	63	36

[1]Drugs and weapons were provided as examples of contraband in the survey question.

[2]A specialized school was defined for respondents as "a school that is specifically for students who were referred for disciplinary reasons. The school may also have students who were referred for other reasons. The school may be at the same location as your school."

[3]Primary schools include those schools whose lowest grade is not higher than 3 and whose highest grade is not higher than 8. Middle schools include those whose lowest grade is not lower than 4 and whose highest grade is not higher than 9. High schools include schools whose lowest grade is not lower than 9 and whose highest grade is not higher than 12. All other schools with other combinations of grades have been omitted from this analysis.

[4]Urban fringe includes schools in the urban fringe of a large or midsize city, defined as any incorporated place, Census-designated place, or nonplace territory within a Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA) or Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) of a large or midsize city and defined as urban by the U.S. Census Bureau.

[5]Based on principals' responses to the question, "How would you describe the crime level in the area(s) in which your students live?" Principals could respond with "high level of crime," "moderate level of crime," "low level of crime," or "students come from areas with very different levels of crime."

[6]Schools in Tennessee did not provide estimates of students' race and are not included in these estimates.

NOTE: Either school principals or the person most knowledgeable about discipline issues at school completed the SSOCS questionnaire. Standard errors are available at http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2007010.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), 2004.

Differences were also found in allowable disciplinary policies by school level. For example, 85 percent of high schools allowed out-of-school suspensions, compared with 77 percent of middle schools and 60 percent of primary schools. Furthermore, a greater percentage of high schools than middle and primary schools allowed removal of a student from school for at least the remainder of the year (70 percent vs. 59 and 42 percent, respectively).

Urbanicity. A smaller percentage of rural schools than city schools provided training to help parents deal with students' problem behaviors (43 vs. 60 percent) or involve parents at school to maintain school discipline (17 vs. 31 percent). Schools in cities and urban fringe areas were more likely than rural schools to require students to wear uniforms (29 and 12 percent, respectively, vs. 5 percent). A greater percentage of city schools than rural schools performed random metal detector checks (12 vs. 3 percent) or had security officers or police present on a regular basis (51 vs. 38 percent). However, rural and town schools were more likely than city and urban fringe schools to use dogs to conduct random drug checks (31 and 32 percent vs. 11 and 16 percent, respectively).

Level of crime. Sixty-one percent of schools with students from high-crime areas had security officers or police present on a regular basis, compared to 39 percent of schools with students from low-crime areas. Schools with students from high-crime areas reported higher levels of all selected safety and security measures than schools with students from low-crime areas, with the exception of using dogs to conduct random drug checks.

Level of minority enrollment. Schools with 50 percent or more minority enrollment were more likely to involve parents at school to maintain school discipline than were schools with lower percentages of minority enrollment (30 vs. 13, 16, and 22 percent)[6]. Furthermore, 67 percent of schools with 50 percent or more minority enrollment made efforts to formally obtain parental input on policies related to school crime, compared to 57 percent of schools with 5 to 20 percent minority enrollment and 47 percent of schools with less than 5 percent minority enrollment. About one-third of schools (35 percent) with 50 percent or more minority enrollment required students to wear uniforms, compared to 10 percent or less of schools with smaller percentages of minority enrollment. Fifty-two percent of schools with 50 percent or more minority enrollment had security officers or police present on a regular basis, compared to 39 percent of schools with less than 5 percent minority enrollment.

Summary

This Issue Brief found that schools implemented a variety of school violence prevention and reduction practices and that some practices were more commonly used than others. In addition, practices differed by school level and other selected school characteristics. For example, high schools were more likely than primary schools to implement safety and security procedures, while primary schools were more likely than high schools to promote training for parents to deal with students' problem behavior. Also, schools in rural areas showed different patterns of practices than those in urban areas, with rural schools more likely to use dogs for random drug checks and less likely to use other practices—such as student uniforms, involving parents at school to maintain discipline, and random metal detector checks.

References

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Endnotes

[1] Under P.L. 107-110, Title IV, Part A—Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities, federal legislation also requires states to report on school safety to the public on a school-by-school basis and provide a mechanism for students to leave chronically dangerous schools.

[2] The sample included 2,772 public elementary and secondary schools. The analysis was weighted using the "finalwgt" variable.

[3] It should be noted that schools could only provide responses on selected practices included as items in the questionnaire. Schools may have practices intended to reduce and prevent violence in their schools that were not included in the survey.

[4] The data in this analysis are based on self-reported survey data. It should be noted that limitations inherent to self-reported data may affect estimates (Cantor and Lynch 2000).

[5] These measures reflect principals' reports of the presence of a violence prevention policy or activity at a school, but do not capture the nature and intensity of such efforts.

[6] The categories for percentage of minority enrollment are 50 percent or more, 20 to 50 percent, 5 to 20 percent, and less than 5 percent.

The Issue Brief series presents information on education topics of current interest. All estimates shown are based on samples and are subject to sampling variability. All differences discussed are statistically significant at the .05 level as measured by two-tailed Student's *t* tests (independent *t* tests for cross-sectional analyses); this means a difference is discussed only if the probability that it is due to chance (i.e., sampling variability) is less than 1 in 20. No adjustments were made for multiple comparisons. In the design, conduct, and data processing of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) surveys, efforts are made to minimize the effects of nonsampling error, such as item nonresponse, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error. For more information on the School Survey on Crime and Safety, visit http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ssocs/.

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