

2005-2006

# The Florida Safe and Drug-Free Schools Quality Data Management Project



Annual Report to the Florida Department of Education



**COLLEGE OF CRIMINOLOGY  
AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

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# Introduction

## Executive Summary

### The Florida Safe and Drug-Free Schools Quality Data Management Project 2005–2006 Annual Report to the Florida Department of Education

With this Executive Summary and the publication of the 2005-2006 Annual Report to the Florida Department of Education (Florida DOE), the Florida Safe and Drug-Free Schools Quality Data Management Project (SDFS-QDM) completes its first year of operation. Over this year, significant progress has been made in the assessment of current state- and local-level management and reporting systems that collect data on violence and substance use within Florida's public schools.

Aiding in Florida's effort to implement NCLB and the requirements of the *Uniform Management and Information Reporting System* (UMIRS) built into NCLB, several activities were undertaken on the part of SDFS-QDM project staff. These efforts included a detailed review of the *School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting* (SESIR) System that Florida uses to report incidents of violence and substance use in its schools to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE). Additionally, district and regional workshops designed to train school personnel in the accurate recording of those incidents were carried out at several different times. Other project activities included the piloting of a self-report middle school youth survey and the drafting of a high school self-report survey, both of which measure key indicators of school safety, violence, and substance use. Finally, SDFS-QDM staff initiated an assessment of

the data being collected by the Florida Office of Drug Control (FODC) as it pertains to community-based prevention organizations receiving SDFS funding.

These project activities contribute to the continuous improvement of data quality in several ways. Particular to the SESIR system, ongoing training and technical assistance provided to school administrators and personnel, as well as the analysis of system processes, promotes greater accuracy in officially collected data. In addition to the data collected through the SESIR system, self-report surveys, such as the Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS), have provided data to school districts on youth violence and substance use. With the completion of the Florida Middle School Needs Assessment Survey pilot and the development of the Florida School Environment Survey (FSES) for high school students, administrators will have the capacity to collect data on school violence and substance use at the school level. This will allow for internal assessment of a particular school's needs as opposed to district-wide data obtained through the FYSAS. Further, the development of a web-based tracking system for community-based prevention organizations receiving SDFS funding will increase the capability of the FODC to ensure that funded programs are targeting the problems that they initially intended to address.

# Findings

## SESIR Training

- Several regional SESIR trainings were delivered across the state by project staff to school personnel and school resource officers (SROs). Feedback from attendees indicated the trainings greatly improved their knowledge of the SESIR system and how to accurately interpret whether student behaviors qualified as SESIR incidents.
- SDFS district coordinators indicated that face-to-face SESIR training was far more effective than training delivered through the Internet or provided on CD-ROM.

## SESIR Data Quality

- Based on a survey administered to SDFS district coordinators, several major barriers to accurately reporting data on incidents of violence and substance abuse were identified:
  - Administrators' inability to accurately and consistently interpret whether student behaviors met SESIR incident definitions.
  - Ambiguous or unclear incident descriptions on incident referral forms.
  - Ineffective processes for regular training on SESIR definitions to keep up with personnel turnover.
- A review of incident referral forms from several school districts revealed substantial variation among schools in the consistency of information collected.
- Software system reviews of SESIR data collection programs revealed a variety of issues relating to the data input process:

- Limited functionality of data input screens.
- A high degree of variability among software systems concerning quality assurance checks.
- Incomplete menus that fail to allow users to select from the full range of available incidents and related data elements.

## Student Self-Report Surveys

- A state-supported survey instrument is not available to measure the incidence of violence and substance use at the school level in Florida schools.
- A pilot survey administered to Florida middle-school students using a hand written and Web-based format revealed that web-based self-report surveys are currently not feasible given the computer infrastructure and resources available in Florida schools.

## Community-Based Organization (CBO) Data

- A review of the process through which CBO programming data are collected revealed that the data are available in narrative form only, obscuring categorization and summarization of programs receiving SDFS funding.
- There is no systematic method by which to compare CBO self-evaluations and process data with originally intended strategies and methods proposed by CBOs in their SDFS grant applications.

## Literature Review on Violence and Substance Abuse

- Many researchers have found early bullying behavior to be predictive of delinquent and criminal careers.
- Community characteristics have been linked to levels of school violence and should be considered in prevention decision-making.
- The school environment should be considered in prevention efforts as well as programming aimed at individual student behaviors.
- Regarding prevention and intervention programming, it is not merely the content that determines its effectiveness but also the delivery method.
- Improving the fidelity of program implementation is just as important for successful outcomes as altering the type of prevention programming already being administered.
- School disciplinary practices may have unintended, negative consequences, both for the individual student and for the school environment as a whole.

## Future Direction

- Continuation and expansion of face to face SESIR training and technical assistance efforts, including “train the trainer” sessions directed at SDFS coordinators and school personnel, to improve the accuracy and quality of data reporting in Florida schools.
- Improvement of the homogeneity of district referral forms to reduce the likelihood of data input errors in the data collection systems currently used to report SESIR data to USDOE.
- Based on project findings, starting in the 2006-2007 school year Florida schools will begin reporting students' unexcused absences to improve the accuracy of truancy information.
- Development and distribution of school-level self-report surveys in Florida schools to enable local level administrators to appropriately address the prevention and intervention programming needs in their schools.
- Development of a web-based data collection system for CBO SDFS grant awardees that will allow for the systematic monitoring of program characteristics and implementation progress.

# Conclusion

This 2005-2006 Annual Report marks the completion of the first year of SDFS-QDM project activities. It presents results of an overall assessment of the data systems and data needs in Florida as they relate to the incidence of crime, violence, and disruption in Florida's public schools and the prevention programs in place to address these issues. Activities in years two and three of the project will be guided by these findings and seek to overcome the barriers to quality data that were uncovered during the assessment phase. This will be achieved by improving Florida's data collections systems, incorporating rigorous analyses of Florida DOE and self-report survey data, and developing a method for quickly gathering important information from CBOs receiving SDFS funding. The result of these activities will provide Florida DOE, the Florida Office of Drug Control, and other decision-makers with a comprehensive study of the science and practice of prevention and the use of data for prevention planning.

# The Center for Criminology and Public Policy Research

*Changing lives through policy-relevant research.*

A branch of the College of Criminology and Criminal Justice, the FSU Center for Criminology and Public Policy Research expands the influence of scholarship in the public policy arena and promotes evidence-based policy-making and practice at the state and national levels.

The Center's primary goal is to support data collection and research initiatives with application to crime and justice policy that promotes social justice. It works to achieve the following objectives:

- Conduct rigorous, policy-relevant empirical research.
- Disseminate knowledge to policymakers, practitioners, and citizens.
- Contribute to the field of criminology with theoretically relevant and methodologically sound research published in leading academic journals.

The Center staff has advanced degrees in many disciplines, including criminology, criminal justice, statistics, sociology, political science, public administration, and education. They collaborate with researchers and policymakers nationwide

and maintain relationships with several federal and state agencies as well as local-level stakeholders in the prevention, juvenile justice education, and criminal justice communities. Through its data-sharing agreements, the Center has created a library of rich data files and a methodology for linking those files with Center-collected data to answer a multitude of research and policy questions.

As an interdisciplinary academic institution engaged in real-world research, the FSU Center for Criminology and Public Policy Research fosters a unique intellectual and collaborative environment in which Center staff bring their practical project experience into the classroom and College faculty bring their theoretical perspectives and expertise to the research activities of the Center. The Center also offers valuable opportunities for graduate students to gain a diverse array of experience and perspectives while training to be tomorrow's leaders in academia, policymaking, and criminal justice practice.

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