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This module describes the SSOCS survey content including the questions asked in SSOCS, data collection procedures and survey timeline, the sources of information respondents use to complete the survey, and a description of how critical items were completed if the initial survey was incomplete.

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The SSOCS survey instrument covers nine topics related to school crime and safety. Each of the following slides provides an overview of the topics and the corresponding items on the SSOCS instrument. All examples of items are from the 2010 SSOCS questionnaire. Since the questionnaire has changed slightly from year to year, for other years, users should refer to the codebook for the survey year of interest.

The first section of the SSOCS survey instrument, “School Practices and Programs,” addresses current school practices and programs that may relate to crime and discipline. Respondents answer questions about programs schools use to prevent and reduce violence, as well as procedures that address potential on-campus crises. These items provide an overview for policymakers and researchers to understand the school environments in which crime occurs.

There are three main questions in this section of SSOCS.

Item one asks about school practices related to school safety, such as requiring visitors to sign or check in. A list of common school practices follows the initial prompt and respondents indicate “yes” or “no” as to whether or not the school uses each practice.

Item two asks whether schools have written plans for procedures to be performed in the event of possible crises. Potential crises listed range from shootings to natural disasters to chemical, biological, or radiological threats or incidents and more. For each item in the list, respondents are also asked whether the school drilled students on the use of the plan for that contingent during the current school year.

Item three asks whether specific components are included in the school’s formal programs intended to prevent or reduce violence. Components listed include behavioral and academic intervention and enrichment programs as well as recreational, enrichment or leisure activities for students.

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The second section, “Parent and Community Involvement at School,” collects information about efforts to involve parents in maintaining school discipline and responding to students’ problem behaviors. In addition, it addresses the level of parent or guardian participation in school-related activities. This section also asks about the extent to which schools involve community groups and related organizations and agencies in their efforts to promote safe schools. Groups listed include juvenile justice agencies, social service agencies, and religious organizations.

Item four asks respondents to indicate ways in which parents are encouraged to be involved. Respondents indicate whether or not there are formal processes to obtain parental input on policies related to crime and discipline. They also indicate whether or not they provide training for parents who are dealing with problem student behavior and if there is a program at the school that involves parents in helping maintain school discipline.

Item five asks respondents to estimate the percentage of students who had at least one parent or guardian participating in different types of events during the school year. Respondents select a percent range of attendance for each type of event or indicate that the school does not offer that type of event.

Item six asks respondents to identify the types of community and outside groups that are involved in helping the school maintain a safe, disciplined, drug free environment.

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The third section, “School Security Staff,” asks respondents about the presence of security guards, security personnel, School Resource Officers, and other sworn law enforcement officers at their schools. These items collect data used to examine the relationship between the presence of these personnel and reports of school crime. Items seven and eight ask respondents to indicate whether security employees are present during various times throughout the school day and after school hours. Item nine asks respondents to indicate the number of full- and part-time security employees, whether they are armed, and whether they participate in particular school activities, such as mentoring students or training teachers in school safety.

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The fourth section, “Staff Training,” asks respondents about training provided by the school or school district for classroom teachers or aides. Item 12 asks about classroom management; school-wide discipline policies and practices related to violence; school-wide discipline policies and practices related to alcohol and/or drug use; safety procedures; the identification of potentially violent students, and the identification of students using illegal substances. This section also inquires about training for positive behavioral intervention strategies and training in crisis prevention and intervention.

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The fifth section, “Limitations on Crime Prevention,” asks respondents whether there are barriers to efforts to reduce or prevent crime by any factors related to teachers, parents, students, or administrative policies. Such limitations include inadequate teacher training or lack of teacher support for school policies, the likelihood of complaints from parents, fear of student retaliation, and federal, state, or district policies on discipline and safety.

In this section, item 13 asks respondents to estimate the extent to which each listed factor limits the school’s effort to reduce or prevent crime. The rating options are: limits in a major way; limits in a minor way; and does not limit.

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The sixth section, “Frequency of Crime and Violence at School,” focuses on the incidence of homicides and shootings that occur at school. Because such incidents are infrequent, respondents are asked only whether they have occurred in the current school year. Item 14 asks respondents to indicate if there has been a student or school personnel homicide at the school. Item 15 asks respondents to indicate all firearm incidents that take place at school regardless of whether students or school personnel are involved.

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The seventh section, “Number of Incidents,” asks respondents about a variety of criminal incidents that may have occurred at the schools during the current school year. It is important to note that this section asks respondents to count specific incidents, not the number of victims or offenders. Respondents include recorded incidents committed by both students and nonstudents. In addition to the total number of recorded incidents, respondents report the number of recorded incidents reported to the police.

Item 16 asks about criminal incidents at the school including rape, robbery, physical attack, distribution, possession, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs, and vandalism. There is a separate question about incidents of hate- and gang-related crimes.

Additional questions in this section ask about the number of times activities were disrupted during the school year by unplanned fire alarms, death or bomb threats, and chemical, biological, or radiological threats.

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The eighth section, “Disciplinary Problems and Actions,” asks about the degree to which schools face disciplinary problems and their response to some specified problems.

Item 20 asks questions concerning how often disciplinary problems occur at school; respondents estimate the extent of each problem “to the best of your knowledge.” A five-point scale – ranging from “happens daily” to “never happens” is then presented for each potential disciplinary problem listed. Problems include student racial and ethnic

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tensions, student bullying, and gang activities. There is an additional section about cyberbullying incidents. Cyberbullying is defined separately from other types of incidents because it is often difficult to determine whether it happens “at school.” Instead, respondents indicate whether cyberbullying incidents have impacted students, the environment, or staff at the school.

The second part of this section includes questions about disciplinary actions the school takes when problems arise. First, respondents must indicate whether a listed disciplinary action is allowable at the school. Then they indicate whether that action was used during the current school year. Actions listed range from more severe consequences, including removal of students from school, transfers, and out-of-school suspensions; to less severe consequences such as detention, referral for counseling and loss of privileges.

Next in this section, respondents complete a table demonstrating the relationships between certain offenses and the resulting disciplinary actions. For each listed offense, the respondent must note the total students involved in the type of offense, regardless of disciplinary action, and then the number of students receiving each type of disciplinary action for that type of offense. Respondents report information about the number of students disciplined for five specific offenses: use or possession of a firearm or explosive device; use or possession of a weapon other than a firearm or explosive device; distribution, possession, or use of illegal drugs; distribution, possession or use of alcohol; and physical attacks or fights.

The final question in this section asks respondents to count the total number of students removed from school without continuing services and the number of students who were transferred to specialized schools for any disciplinary reason.

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The ninth and final section of the survey, “School Characteristics” asks respondents about school and student characteristics. Item 25 asks about total enrollment.

Item 26 asks about the percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; of limited English proficiency; in special education; and the percentage of students who are male.

Item 27 asks respondents to estimate the percentage of students below the 15th percentile on standardized tests, likely to go to college after high school, and consider academic achievement to be very important.

Item 28 asks respondents to provide an average for the number of daily classroom changes students make; give an estimate of the level of crime in the areas where students live and where the school is located; calculate average daily attendance and number of students transferring during the year; and indicate school type (regular public, charter, or magnet).

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SSOCS is a mail survey with telephone follow-up. Prior to data collection, NCES works with the school districts to obtain approval for selected schools to participate in the survey.

Principals of the sampled schools receive a brochure, like the one shown here, describing the importance of the survey. Instructions provided within the SSOCS survey instrument request that the person most knowledgeable about school crime and policies to provide a safe environment complete the survey. This person may be the principal, vice principal, school resource officer or other school safety personnel.

Questionnaires are mailed during the spring semester - generally in February or March. However, respondents report on crime incidents over the entire school year. Principals receive mail reminders and, if surveys are not returned in the time frame requested, non-respondents are contacted by phone. In 2010, data collection was originally scheduled to end on May 28, but was extended until June 11, 2010, to allow additional time to reach non-responding schools.

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Throughout the SSOCS survey instrument, respondents draw from three distinct sources of knowledge to answer the questions: first-hand knowledge, estimates, and official school records.

First-hand knowledge is needed for a number of items, including the items that ask about school policy and procedures. For example, the first section of the survey asks respondents about the practices of the school, including whether visitors are required to sign in, students are required to wear uniforms, and other day-to-day policies of the school. For this item, and for similar items, respondents are expected to pull from their first-hand knowledge of the daily operations of the school as well as their knowledge of the policies and procedures of the school.

Other items explicitly ask for estimates. For example, item 5 asks respondents to provide their “best estimate” of the percentage of students who had at least one parent or guardian in attendance at various school events during the school year.

Finally, for some items, respondents are asked to consult school records. For example, on item 16 respondents enumerate the “recorded instances” of disciplinary actions for various offenses during the current school year. In some schools, these actions must be reported to states and districts, therefore official figures are available.

There are errors associated with any survey data that rely on individual recollection, estimation and manual completion of responses. Researchers should consider these data limitations when analyzing and reporting data from SSOCS.

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In some cases, surveys are returned, but fail to meet minimum thresholds for completion of critical items necessary for inclusion in the final data. Schools with incomplete surveys are re-contacted for missing information, as are schools with anomalous responses on critical items. These critical items are listed in the table displayed.

There are 15 critical survey items. Respondents are re-contacted if their returned survey meets one or more of the following conditions:

- The respondent completed fewer than 80 percent of these critical items;
- The questionnaire listed three or more incidents of rape in subitem 16a;
- The questionnaire had five or more abnormally high or abnormally low responses (sometimes called soft-range violations);
- The questionnaire had a ratio of students to Full-Time Equivalency teachers of less than 1 or greater than 50;
- Less than 60 percent of the total subitems eligible for recontact were completed – this includes all survey items and subitems except for the first seven introductory questions;
- Less than 60 percent of item 16 subitems were completed; or
- Less than 60 percent of item 22 subitems were completed.

Respondents are asked to resolve issues related to the missing and out-of-range data. In cases where the re-contacts fail to produce a satisfactory resolution, values may be imputed for missing items. If missing or anomalous data cannot be satisfactorily completed, the survey is not included in the final data set.

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This module described the SSOCS survey content in terms of the questions asked in SSOCS, data collection procedures and timeline, respondents sources of information, non-response follow up, and completion procedures for surveys that were returned without answers to critical items.

Important resources that have been shown throughout the module are summarized in this slide along with the module's objectives for your reference.

You may now proceed to the next module in the series, or click the exit button to return to the landing page.