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SCHOOL CRIME AND STUDENT MISBEHAVIOR PROJECT

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUBMITTED TO
THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE
JANUARY 15, 1986

U.S. Department of Justice

100496c.

San Francisco ▪ Washington D.C.

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SCHOOL CRIME AND STUDENT MISBEHAVIOR PROJECT

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The United States Departments of Justice and Education sponsored the School Crime and Student Misbehavior Project in response to public desire for safer schools. When project planning began in the early 1980s, the perception that crime and fear of crime pervaded American schools was widespread. Previous research, such as the 1977 National Institute of Education "Safe Schools Study," confirmed that perception. For some students, attending school had become more dangerous than remaining in their home neighborhoods.

In 1981, the U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on Violent Crime recommended federal leadership in reducing school crime. The Task Force's final report urged the Attorney General ". . . to seek to build a national consensus that drug abuse, crime, and violence have no rightful place in the schools and, when these conditions are found to exist, vigorous criminal law enforcement should ensue." With President Reagan adding his endorsement to those recommendations, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) moved to bring its experience and resources to the assistance of local educators.

To create a federal partnership that would represent cooperation between the criminal justice and education systems in reducing school crime, NIJ collaborated with the Department of Education to cosponsor a pilot project. Assent by the Secretary of Education lead to a "Memorandum of Understanding" that pledged funds from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement to match those from each of two Department of Justice divisions--NIJ and the National Institute of Juvenile Justice and

Delinquency Prevention (NIJJDP). With NIJ acting as the lead agency, this new federal partnership developed plans to help communities across the country restore order to their schools.

Federal involvement in the project was limited to leading by example, coordinating technical assistance, and disseminating results. To avoid undue federal intrusion into local affairs, sites did not receive funds for participating. Moreover, site personnel were not required to conform to a rigid, federally mandated, demonstration model. Instead, they were afforded considerable autonomy to modify or eliminate project methodologies as needed to suit their circumstances.

The methodologies sites implemented came from the National Alliance for Safe Schools (NASS), an Austin, Texas-based institution headed by Dr. Robert Rubel. NASS assisted the sites by providing training and technical assistance without intervening directly in local affairs. The American Justice Institute, and later URSA Institute, conducted the evaluation.

Goals

In establishing project goals, NIJ and NASS drew upon school crime analyses NASS had conducted previously for NIJ. The NASS analyses, based on findings from many studies, concluded that certain common school administration practices and characteristics actually foster crime. The reports asserted that school administrators:

- do not report most crimes to the police;
- lack a comprehensive awareness of the antisocial incidents occurring on their campuses;

- do not distinguish very carefully between some school rule violations and crimes; and
- have not been trained to prevent crime or respond properly when it occurs.

To a great extent, the project was undertaken to reverse each these items. The overall goal was to create a safer learning environment by:

- identifying school crime and student misbehavior--who, what when, and where;
- preventing and/or intervening, when feasible; and
- providing vigorous criminal law enforcement against school crime, and firm and fair application of school discipline rules, when appropriate.

Underlying this goals statement is the conviction that schools should not be sanctuaries from law enforcement. The response to criminals should not depend on whether an offense is committed in school or in the community. School administrators must be able to recognize crime and take appropriate initial responses. Beyond that, to conserve their limited resources for education and to protect law abiding students, they should call upon criminal justice system agencies for assistance. School administrators needed to become more aware that some student misbehavior is criminal. Once they routinely differentiated between crimes and violations of school rules, they would be better able to respond appropriately to both.

Project Design

To reach these goals, the project design incorporated many of the methodologies suggested in the earlier NASS analyses. Those methodologies

consisted primarily of law enforcement and community development techniques adapted for school administration. As conceptualized for this project, they constituted the following three major, integrated elements, each of which is elaborated in Figure 1.

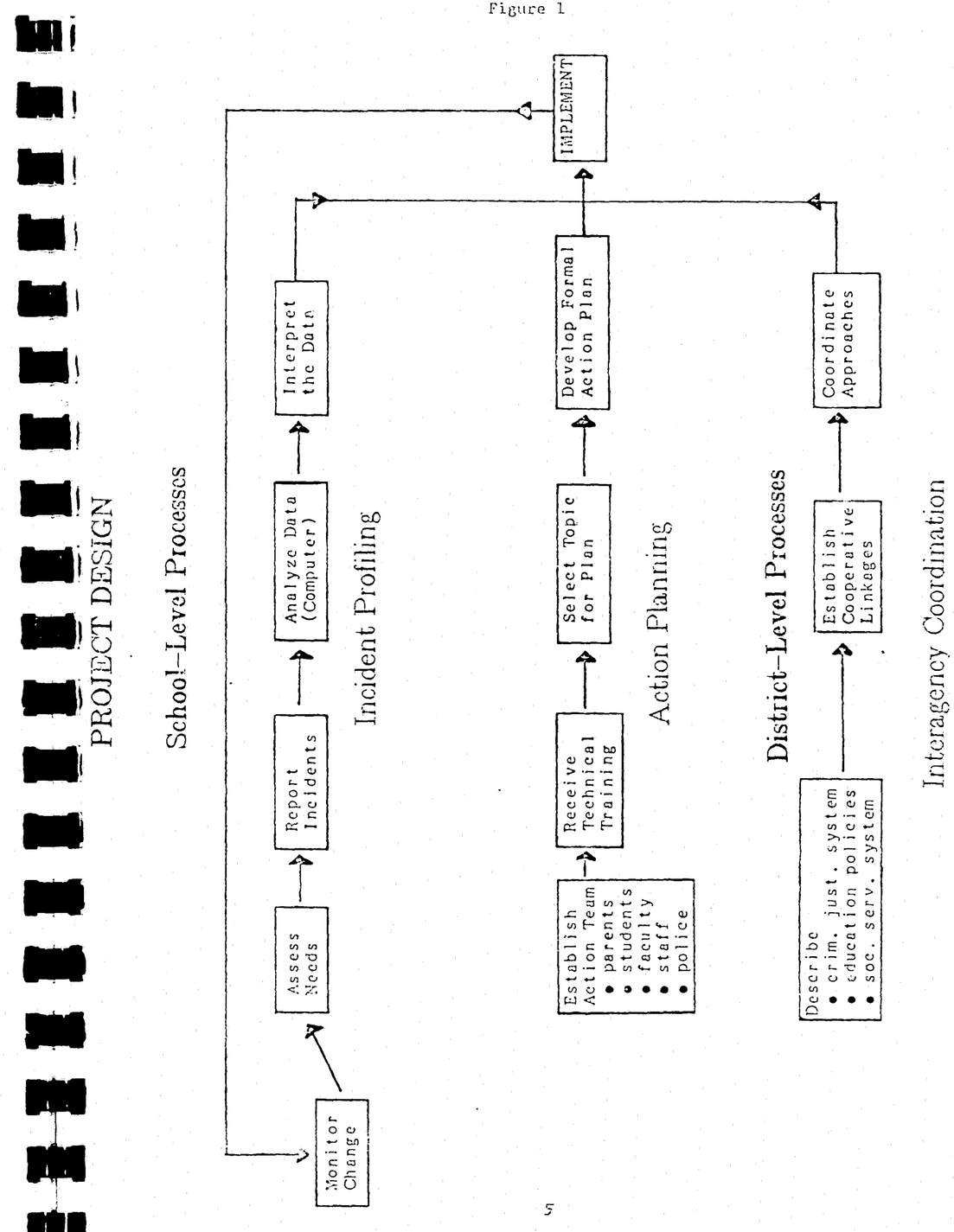
- Incident profiling (crime analysis)
- Action planning (intervention development and implementation)
- Interagency coordination

Of the three elements, incident profiling figured most prominently in the project design. Though new to the schools, the rudiments of incident profiling, or "crime analysis," had been used in law enforcement for more than a decade. Metropolitan police departments have used the system to identify high crime areas so officers could be assigned where most needed. As adapted for school administration, incident profiling provided a structured method for collecting and analyzing the following data about school crime and student misbehavior:

- incident type (theft, arson, drugs, etc.);
- incident subtype (theft from student, or theft from teacher);
- zone or area of the school where incident occurred;
- day of week and class period when incident occurred; and
- victim and offender characteristics (sex, race, grade level, group affiliation).

Collecting and analyzing this information might increase school administrators awareness of specific problems on their campuses and sensitize them to the criminal nature of some incidents.

Figure 1



PROJECT DESIGN

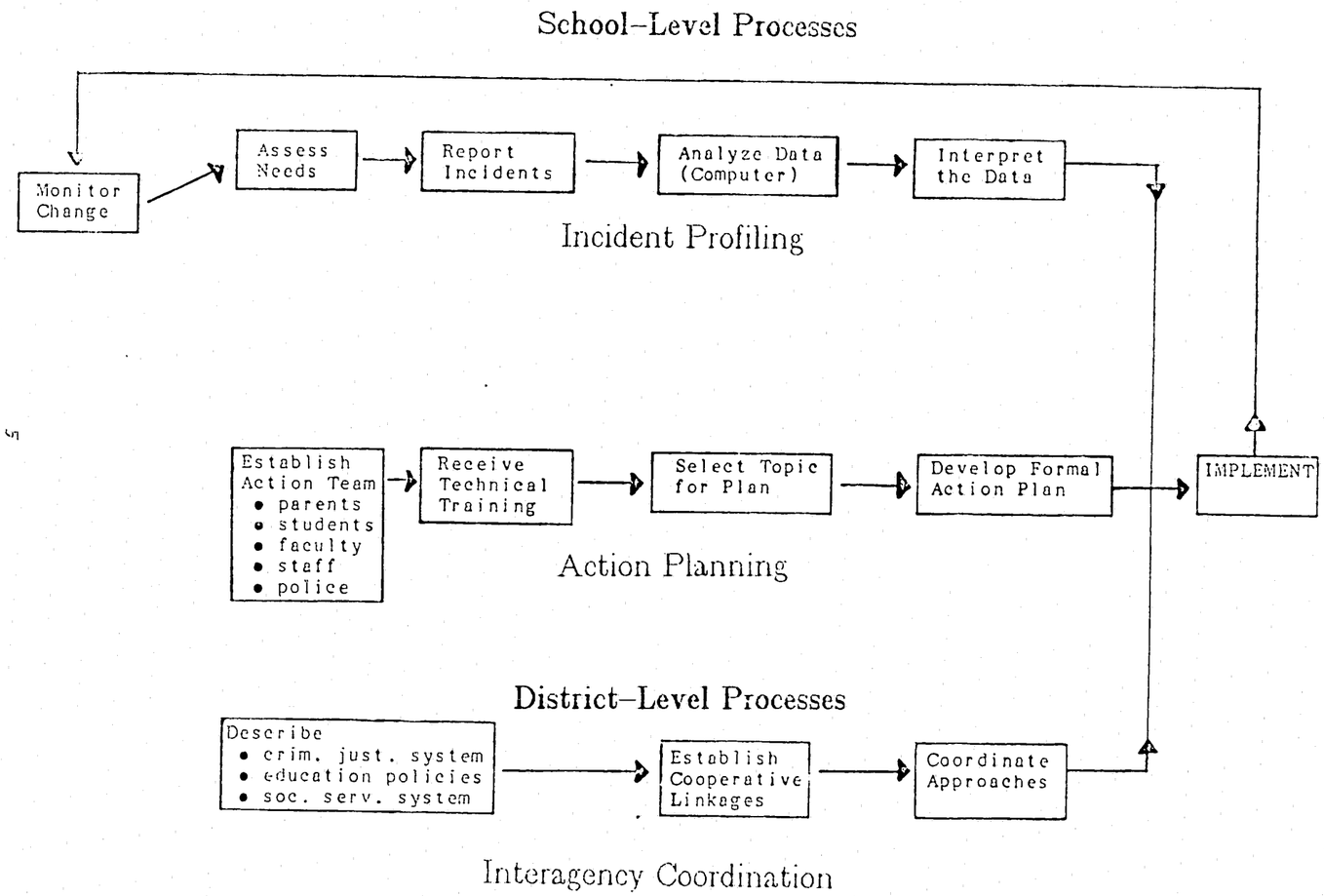


Figure 1

The second element of the project, action planning, gave school personnel techniques for responding to the problems incident profiling identified. As designed, the project's contribution in this regard was to be not so much in offering solutions, but in introducing administrators to methods they could use to devise their own solutions. For that purpose, schools developed written "action plans" to focus their available resources on particular targets. In developing these plans, principals were encouraged to form school-wide "action teams" consisting of administrators, teachers, counselors, students, custodians, parents, and anyone else who might have a different perspective on the school's safety needs and ways to meet them. In its fullest form, the action planning process consisted of the following steps.

- Assemble team
- Select target (refer to incident profiling data)
- Set goals
- Develop formal action plans
- Implement interventions
- Monitor results (refer again to incident profiling data)
- Revise target, goals, or interventions as needed

The third project element, interagency cooperation, also emphasized teamwork and problem solving. School districts joined forces with law enforcement, probation, courts, and human services so each could do its part in fighting school crime without impeding or duplicating the work of the others. This aspect of the project was conducted primarily at the district level. Plans called for superintendents to follow the lead of the federal partnership between Justice and Education by inviting other

top administrators to discuss their mutual interests in campus safety. In time, they were to adopt formal agreements regarding procedures for interchanges among the agencies and encourage cooperation among their staffs.

As envisioned in the project design, each of these three major elements was interrelated. Incident profiling laid the groundwork for the others by focusing administrators' attention on campus disorder. Since administrators had to distinguish between crimes and school rule violations, and further differentiate among categories and subcategories of each, they could recognize specific problems suitable for action planning. Moreover, incident profiling reports would give district administrators information about prevalent school crime problems to share with other agencies. Based on that data, an interagency group might implement cooperative, district-wide interventions.

For the incident profiling and action planning elements of the project, the design included formal training sessions. NASS staff and expert trainers conducted several workshops at each site to familiarize participants with project rationales and methodologies. For the other major element, interagency coordination, NASS coordinated three cluster conferences bringing together agency representatives from all the sites.

Evaluation Design

The evaluation was designed to be formative, process-oriented, and interactive. Because the federal partnership sponsored the project to experiment with new approaches, determining how the sites implemented project methodologies was emphasized over measuring long-term impact on school crime. Accordingly, the evaluation was integrated with the project

to provide immediate feedback. Findings and recommendations from periodic assessments were provided verbally and in written monthly reports to the project director and federal monitors.

To build a knowledge base for modification and replication, the evaluation documented all activities, noted how they differed in various settings, and, to the extent possible, determined their effects on school administration. Collaboration among the evaluation director, project director, and federal monitors before the project began produced the following list of five questions that focused the inquiry.

- How effective was the training NASS conducted?
- How did the schools, districts, and communities adapt the project methodologies to suit their circumstances?
- What characteristics distinguished schools, districts, and communities that differentially implemented project components?
- What elements of the project were institutionalized?
- How much value did administrators derive from various aspects of the project?

The evaluation design was created with a great deal of flexibility to address these questions as the project evolved. It called for multiple data collection methods tied to each aspect of the project. Only a few of the necessary measures for each purpose were developed at the beginning of the project. The rest were designed shortly before their administration so they could be tailored to changing circumstances. Answers for the key questions were sought by:

- obtaining existing materials;

- gathering materials generated for the project;
- directly observing project activities;
- interviewing project participants;
- administering respondent-identified questionnaires;
- anonymously surveying students' perceptions of school climate; and
- anonymously surveying participants' opinions of the project, their schools, and related matters.

SITES

Three geographically, socially, and demographically diverse communities participated in the project. All three sites featured urban populations greater than 125,000 and school districts with 10 or more secondary schools. Beyond that, they were selected based on their school districts having exceptionally capable administrations, clear commitment to school safety, and few serious crime problems. Those conditions were desired so that project methodologies could be fine-tuned in relatively stable environments. Once the project had been pre-tested in orderly schools, it could be introduced at more disrupted campuses. As partially indicated by the statistics in Table 1, the three communities and school districts listed below met these criteria.

Anaheim, California: Anaheim Union High School District

Rockford, Illinois: Rockford Public Schools

Jacksonville, Florida: Duval County Public Schools

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation began in late summer, 1983 and ran as scheduled through spring, 1985. To allow sufficient time for administrators to experiment with project methodologies, training and technical assistance were

Table 1
Site Characteristics

COMUNITIES	Anaheim (City)	Rockford (City)	Jacksonville (Duval County)
Location	25 miles S of Los Angeles	80 miles NW of Chicago	NE Coast of Florida
Population	219,311	139,712	571,003
% White	86	84	74
% Black	1	13	25
% Other	12	1	1
Unemployment Rate	8	31	7
% Children Below Poverty Level	10	14	22
Serious Crime Rate per 100,000 Population	7,760	9,150	7,865
SCHOOL DISTRICTS			
Number of Schools	19	52	140
Secondary Schools	19	11	37
Schools in Project	19	11	16
Enrollment	23,711	28,564	98,595
Enrollment of Schools in Project	23,711	13,283	22,766
Operating Budget	$85,000,000	$96,000,000	$242,000,000
Expenditures per Pupil*	$2,300	$2,900	$2,300
Annual Property Loss*	$8,000	$96,000	$295,000

Sources: Demographics: 1980 statistics from U.S. Census Bureau, 1982 City and County Data Book.
Crime rates: Uniform Crime Reports, 1982.
School data: district reports, 1983-84.

* May not be computed identically by each district.

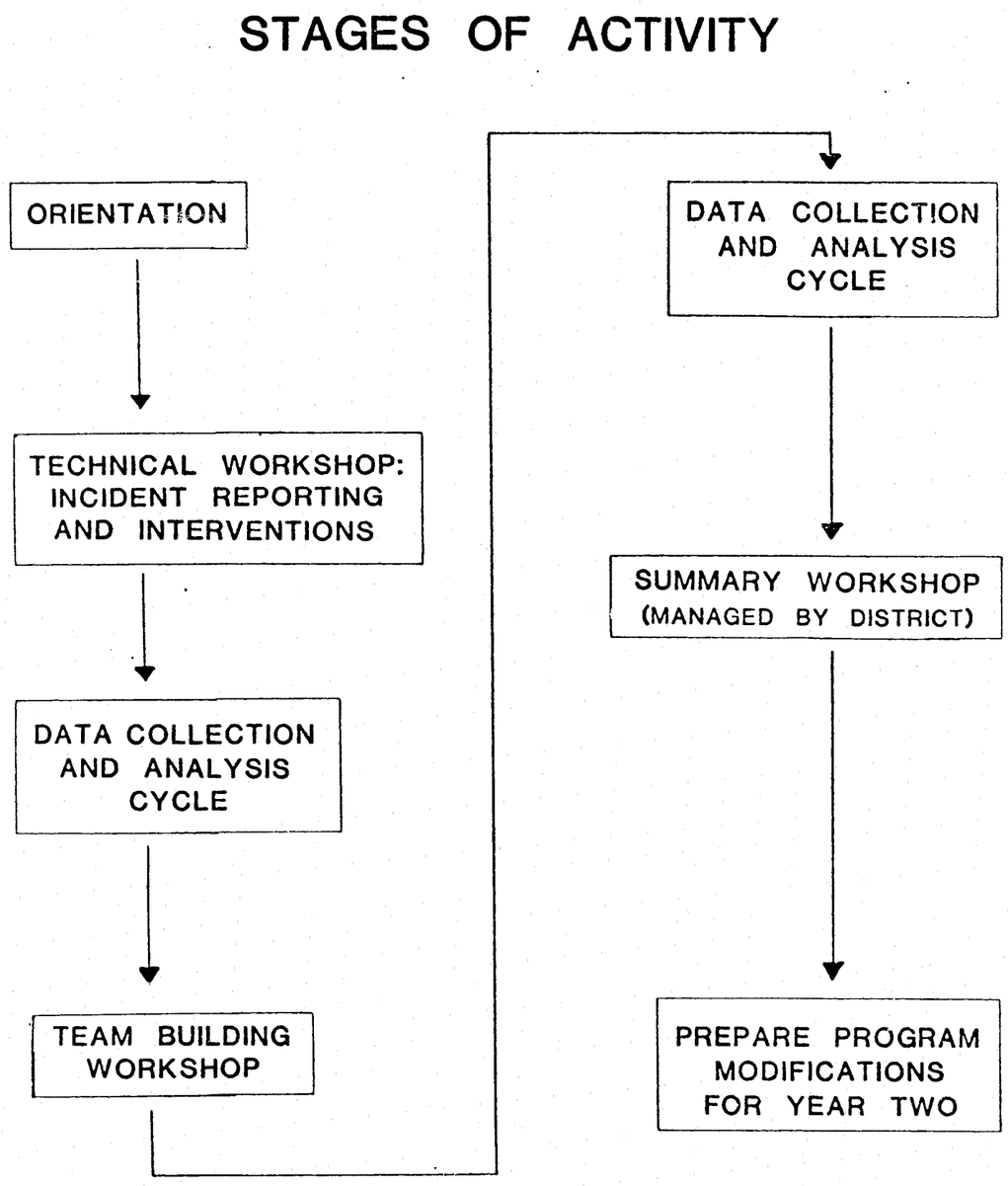
concentrated in the first year. Thereafter, administrators continued using and adapting the methodologies they learned, but did not undertake additional project tasks. The sequence of steps for school-based activities is shown in Figure 2.

The incident profiling phase commenced with on-site training sessions for all principals and assistant principals in each district. In the following months, those administrators implemented the incident profiling system in their schools with assistant principals recording incident information on special forms. Rockford and Anaheim principals then manually aggregated the data on summary charts. In Jacksonville, and later in the other two districts, a computer relieved principals from tabulating incident reports.

After using incident profiling for three to four months, administrators attended a second workshop. This time they brought along newly-assembled school "action teams" to receive the training and become involved in the project. Following the workshop, the schools added the action planning component to incident profiling. For this phase, the teams, or in some schools administrators alone, selected specific crime or discipline targets, developed suitable interventions, implemented their plans, and monitored results.

While all this activity was occurring at the school level, district administrators began to involve criminal justice and human service agencies in the project. Because no preexisting coalition at any the three sites was suitable for this project, the districts' first step was to invite various agencies to participate. At each site, the superintendent initiated

Figure 2



contact by sending letters describing the project and inviting agency involvement. Local circumstances determined the eventual composition and activities of these interagency groups. Each, though, directed its attention to at least one school problem that affected other organizations.

Though no formal training was necessary for this aspect of the project, NASS facilitated cooperation by working with district administrators to hold three project-wide cluster conferences--one per site. Each site sent a delegation of ten school and community representatives to these discussion and planning sessions. The first conference, held in Anaheim in July 1984, allowed participants from the three sites to meet each other, exchange ideas, and set their goals and agenda for the next year. Sites' achievements and expectations for the future were the topics for two additional cluster conferences following the first one in Anaheim. Jacksonville hosted the second in December 1984, and Rockford hosted the third in May 1985.

Implementation varied substantially across sites and schools, making generalizations difficult. For example, a few assistant principals used the incident profiling system to track virtually every incident; some at the opposite extreme recorded none or very few; and the majority recorded only incidents they considered serious, with criteria for inclusion varying from school to school. Uses of action planning also differed. Teams varied from large groups representing a cross-section of the school to a single assistant principal. Their plans were as diverse as the problems they addressed and the resources available to implement them. Most of them chose to address discipline problems, since they did not

regard their crime problems as very serious. As Table 2 suggests, though, some of the most original action plans dealt with crime or its noncriminal precursors.

Table 2
Selected Action Plan Topics and Interventions

Theft	Required students to park bicycles in a single lot visible throughout the day from several classrooms
Drugs	Worked with police department to disperse suspected drug dealers operating on campus periphery
Theft	Limited student access to locker areas during lunch
Vandalism	Placed student artwork on previously defaced main entrance doors
Drugs	Started drug counseling program
Theft	Rescheduled custodians from evenings to afternoons and assigned them to locker areas, where their presence would deter theft
Fighting	Created student team to counsel fighters and potential fighters
Tardies	Locked all classroom doors when the tardy bell rang and penalized students who remained outside
Fighting	Conducted seminar for students on ways to avoid fighting
General	Reduced time allowed for changing classes
General	Offered cash rewards to students providing information about the "Crime of the Week"

Interagency groups, too, differed in response to local circumstances. Jacksonville's "multiagency coordinating committee" emphasized information sharing among agencies to facilitate coordinated responses to youths most seriously threatening the schools and the community. Anaheim's task force listed eleven areas for potential coordination, including child abuse,

latch key children, drug use, and school attendance. The Rockford group decided to work on school attendance. The groups' individual strategies attested to the adaptability of the general project design for different purposes. By the end of the second year, the Anaheim and Jacksonville groups had solidified enough to plan activities extending well beyond the last date of federal sponsorship.

MAJOR FINDINGS

As anticipated, closely monitoring the project generated two sets of findings, one about school crime and ongoing responses to it and another about the specific methodologies tested during the project. The project-specific findings detail how the project created a climate of concern about school safety that fostered corrective and preventive actions within and beyond the schools. The background findings are important in two respects. First, they increase our knowledge of how schools have responded since campus disorder became a widely-acknowledged problem. Second, they establish the context for interpreting the project-specific findings.

Background Findings

1. The participating school districts had intervened previously to improve campus safety and had minimized their serious crime problems. The prevailing perception that American campuses are in chaos did not apply to many, if any, of the participating schools. Jacksonville and Anaheim report that new behavior policies and other measures initiated two to three years prior to the project substantially reduced crime and discipline problems. Rockford administrators credit their police liaison crime program with keeping their campuses relatively crime

free throughout the previous decade. Most administrators were satisfied they had adequate control over their campuses.

2. Almost all administrators in the project schools were willing to have law enforcement officers arrest students who broke the law. The notion that well-meaning educators coddle youthful criminals applied to very few project administrators. Students sometimes suffered more punishment if they committed an offense at school than in the community since the behavior code sanction was added to the criminal justice system penalty.

3. Relations between schools and law enforcement were very good, in contrast to generally abysmal relations between schools and probation. The belief that educators do not trust or get along with law enforcement officers also did not hold true for any site. The school administrators had come to value police and the police were more experienced with responding to calls from schools than they once were. Relations with probation, on the other hand, have deteriorated. Participants cited dissatisfaction with the inefficacy of the probation system and annoyance that they do not receive notice when a student is placed on probation, even though attending school may be a condition of the probation order.

4. Due process requirements did not jeopardize campus safety in districts with adequate student conduct codes. Only a handful of administrators expressed any apprehension about being sued for disciplining a student. Assistant principals almost uniformly credited district codes of conduct for establishing workable, constitutionally permissible procedures to follow before imposing a sanction.

5. School administrators' concerns about campus crime were inextricably linked with discipline concerns. While acknowledging differences between crime and discipline, administrators saw them as manifestations of a single problem--disobedience. Attendance too fit into this large category that administrators tended to consider as more unitary than segregated. Law enforcement officers working with the schools generally agreed that crime reduction strategies must include discipline and attendance components.

As these findings suggest, the project came to school districts that had already endorsed some of its basic precepts. That reduced the need for changing some practices and opinions because they already accorded with what the project sought to achieve. At the same time, it limited the magnitude of effects the project could produce and reduced administrators interest in some of its methodologies. Since their current procedures were working for them, they had little incentive to change. These conditions should be kept in mind in reviewing the following findings.

Project-Specific Findings

1. Participating in the project stimulated administrators to become more proactive in responding to crime and misbehavior. The major value of the project lay in its ability to motivate action. By motivating busy administrators to take the necessary time to address noneducational problems, the project brought about desirable changes. Recording incidents, reviewing printouts, and developing action plans all focused attention on a problem; district review provided incentive for administrators to try to solve it.

2. School administrators conducted incident profiling proficiently. Participants rapidly demonstrated they could use the incident profiling technology in the schools. With few exceptions, they were able to apply the incident category definitions, operate the mechanics of reporting and aggregating, and interpret the summary charts.

3. Incident profiling did not add much to school administrators' knowledge of crime and misbehavior on their campuses. Very few administrators reported learning anything new from reviewing incident profiling printouts. Either the number of incidents recorded was too low to form patterns or the patterns the system revealed were already known. Moreover, pattern identification is a very crude indicator of problems, and, as such, of little value to administrators who have many other, more richly detailed, information sources. In a few schools, though, incident profiling did detect previously overlooked patterns, such as prevalence of theft during the last two periods of the day.

4. School teams contributed new ideas in a few schools but most administrators limited them to a minimal role. Principals generally attributed lack of significant team involvement to difficulties in scheduling team meetings when members could attend and lack of student or administrator interest in developing strategies for problems they did not regard as serious. Where these constraints were overcome, some teams demonstrated their utility in devising innovative solutions and sharing administrators' burden of keeping schools safe.

5. The project emphasis on interagency coordination addressed a strongly felt need for better responses to serious and repeat criminal offenders. Though capable of responding to most school rule violations and minor criminal offenses without calling upon outside agencies, school administrators acknowledged their need for assistance from law enforcement, probation, and juvenile courts to deal with students who sell drugs, commit crimes against persons, or repeatedly break the law. Deinstitutionalization has left many offenders in school and in need of services beyond education. By fostering interagency coordination, the project created a mechanism for delivering those services and minimizing the threat anti-social youths pose in the schools.

6. Interagency groups favor informal arrangements over written agreements. The interagency groups did not draft the types of agreements envisioned in the project design for guiding their interactions because one or more members at each site saw too much potential for such agreements to be used against them if not followed in a particular case. They did, however, make substantial progress toward undertaking joint endeavors and strengthening informal ties. Members especially valued their newfound ability to communicate with each other quickly to resolve problems and misunderstandings. By improving informal relations, they reduced the need for formal agreements.

7. The partnership between the federal Departments of Justice and Education served as a valuable model of cooperation to spur local efforts. The federal example of cooperation repeatedly stimulated local action. The federal partners succeeded in creating a suitable construct for localities to use in solving their problems without direct federal intervention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings lead logically to the following set of recommendations for transferring any of the project methodologies to other sites. The thrust of these recommendations is to tailor the project to better fit school environments.

1. The incident profiling system should be reduced in scope to match administrators' information needs. The work required to record enough incidents in the system for it to show incident patterns exceeds any likely benefits that would flow from those patterns being identified. The workload could be drastically reduced without sacrificing the main value of incident profiling as a catalyst. Since very few administrators used any summary chart other than the one for offense category totals, all the other information reporting requirements should be either eliminated or made optional. A simple indexing system could cross-reference assistant principals' discipline files as a ready source of details about any category of incidents.
2. Project methodologies should be better integrated with existing security procedures. Complementing rather than replacing ongoing procedures may increase administrators' acceptance of the new techniques. To accomplish this objective, the project director might spend time before or during the initial workshop to determine whether existing procedures are more suitable for those schools than corresponding project methodologies. Alternatively, procedures might be modified to create a hybrid incorporating the best elements of the project and district approaches. For example, whatever system the district uses to report discipline incidents can probably be revised to include the critical features of incident profiling.

3. Once agency chief administrators establish good relations, they should foster stronger linkages at the school level. The ultimate benefit of improved interagency relations is better interactions among personnel who interact directly with children. Neither formal nor informal agreements reached at the upper echelons of management will affect interactions further down the bureaucratic hierarchy unless the top administrators set an example and encourage emulation. The Jacksonville technique of bringing together key education and justice administrators and their staffs at focal school site meetings serves this function well. Written agreements play an important role in spurring initial involvement and establishing appropriate guidelines for interagency relations, but the extent to which interaction will actually occur depends primarily on the strength of the ties that form between personnel in the various agencies.
4. Introducing administrators to the school team technique should remain part of the project even though it will not be appropriate for every school. Many factors, such as scheduling flexibility, administrative style, and type of crime or discipline problems, mitigate against team use. Nonetheless, the potential benefits of broad campus involvement in addressing the issues upon which this project focuses warrants continuing to offer the approach to administrators and encouraging them to try it at their schools.
5. Once modified, the project should be replicated in school systems with high crime and/or poor administration. Experimentation in the pilot schools demonstrated the practicality of using project methodologies in educational settings, but left many critical questions unanswered. The project reliance on proficient administration creates a conundrum

that may undermine its utility in disorderly schools. Such schools are likely to be poorly administered and, consequently, unlikely to implement the project satisfactorily. If project methodologies can operate in those settings, the potential for improving the school environment would be much greater than it was for the pilot schools.

6. Replication should be evaluated to carefully assess benefits and costs. Since this evaluation was highly process oriented, results questions relevant to project value were not addressed in detail. To determine whether schools benefit sufficiently to justify the effort required for this project, design of any replication should include a summative evaluation and should extend over several years.

END