

Alcorn School District Title IV Assessment Summary

The first Title IV Safe and Drug Free Schools Principle of Effectiveness requires that recipients of Title IV funds “base their programs on a thorough assessment of objective data about the drug and violence problems in the schools and communities served.” The purpose of this assessment is to identify areas of need and to set priorities for intervention. A comprehensive review of the nature and the extent of substance use and violence problems is an essential step in the process of targeting appropriate interventions and setting goals for improvement (USDE, 1998).

This needs assessment focuses on identifying and understanding patterns in key indicators of substance use and violence across grade cohorts and across time. It is important to note that this approach is not intended to explain the differences between schools or to use the indicators as a measure of performance among schools. Instead, the purpose of these analyses is to prioritize district-wide efforts and to identify areas in need of targeted attention, based on the comparison of schools.

DATA SOURCES

Alcorn School District (ASD) administrative records provided information regarding student substance use and acts of verbal and physical aggression. The discipline referral indicators discussed in this report were based on data extracted from the Mississippi Student Information System (MSIS) discipline data reporting system. Disciplinary events were included that resulted in the following types of removals from the classroom: in-school suspension (ISS); removal to the Alternative Education Program; expulsion from the school.

The selected indicators of substance use and violence were based on data from the Alcorn School District (ASD) administrative records and from a student survey administered to students in grades 6-12. A self-reported student survey of substance use and school safety was given to a random sample of ASD students annually. The ASD also administers the online SmartTrack survey provided by the Mississippi Department of Education through Dream, Inc. Additionally, for some years the district administers the PRIDE Survey. The student surveys are used to track student knowledge, attitudes, and self-reported behavior over time. During the 2007-08 SY, a random sample of homeroom classes in 6th through 12 grades was selected to participate in the surveying. An additional locally developed survey is administered to staff to elicit their attitudes regarding drug use among students and recommendations regarding programming.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The Alcorn School District receives federal funding from the U.S. Department of Education through the Title IV Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities (SDFSC) program. These grant funds flow to the local educational agency through the Mississippi Department of Education. The purpose of the SDFSC grant is to supplement state and local educational organizations' drug abuse and violence prevention efforts. During the 2007-08 school year, the ASD received a Title IV grant in a total amount of \$16,757, which was used to support substance use and violence prevention efforts.

The Student Intervention Model is designed to provide effective interventions for academic, attendance, and behavior concerns, with minimal disruption to the educational process. The behavioral component of the Student Intervention Model draws heavily upon the philosophy of

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) and classifies interventions as Minor, Intermediate, and Major (see attached chart: *Student Intervention Model and Positive Behavior Support*).

Substance use and violence prevention remain prevailing concerns in the ASD. Student-on-student verbal and physical aggression continues to be particularly prevalent in the middle schools, with 15% of enrolled students being referred at least once for verbal or physical aggression, and more than 50% of students experiencing one or more forms of bullying within the past school year. Additionally, the self-reported age of first use of tobacco products, marijuana, and cocaine use among ASD students averages 12 to 14 years. 35% of students self-reported being in a physical fight at least once within the past 30 days, with 15 students receiving “out-of-school” or Alternative School placement for fighting and five (5) for disorderly conduct. In 2007-008, two (2) students received “out-of-school” disciplinary action for possession of a weapon, one (1) for alcohol, fifteen for fighting, 5 for disorderly conduct, and 3 for vandalism.

This information leads to the conclusion that both schoolwide and targeted interventions that focus on violence and substance use prevention are greatly needed at ASD middle schools. In addition, the prevalence of self-reported use of alcohol among high school students has remained consistently high over time, indicating a need for targeted substance use prevention efforts at the secondary level. The 2007-08 results indicated a rise in students self-reporting they seriously considered attempting suicide during the past 12 months (17% of respondents – up from 8% the previous year).

As in the past, the Student Intervention Model framework provides a useful tool for understanding where Title IV resources are needed. The following recommendations were developed based on survey results to address the concerns that were identified through the needs assessment:

1. Provide technical assistance to support the identification and resolution of substance use and violence present needs at the campus level.

Title IV funding will be channeled into effective school-based prevention strategies. Schools must work to identify their most pressing substance use and violence problems and make serious efforts to implement evidence-based interventions, such as PATHS, Capturing Kids Hearts and Learning for Life. Efforts will be made to purchase an anti-bullying program for use at the elementary and middle schools to address the physical violence problem. One option for increasing schools' capacity in these areas is to provide technical assistance to the school-based Teacher Support Teams because these responsibilities fit well with the role of these teams.

2. Continue to work with middle schools to implement a Positive Behavior Support model that helps to improve school climate.

Without school-wide efforts to improve school climate, the disciplinary system will continue to be burdened with the problems of verbal and physical aggression. Given the elevated self-reported frequency of bullying victimization among middle school students, the ASD should work to ensure that middle schools receive the support they need to fully implement Positive Behavior Support strategies to facilitate the development of pro-social behavioral trait that will be reinforced at the middle school level and, consequently, improve the disciplinary climate at district middle schools. Additionally, the District Special Education program will employ a Behavioral Program Specialist, paid with transition funds to provide Functional Behavioral Assessments, development appropriate behavioral plans for students at Tier III, and provide technical assistance to classroom teachers.

3. Support programs both at the middle schools and high schools to address substance use, particularly of tobacco, marijuana, and other drugs.

Alcorn School District students have maintained consistently high levels of self-reported use. Therefore, it is apparent that a proactive approach to substance use prevention is needed in the district. Given that cohort trends tend to be carried forward as students progress through the grade levels, the most effective use of funds may be to support earlier interventions at the middle school level. Since Title IV funds are very limited, efforts will be made to increase the emphasis on drug prevention and education through online resources, such as BrainPop, and other resources and services that are free of charge.

4. Ensure that substance use screening and referral services are available to high school students.

Substance use problem identification and referral services are essential to ensure that intervention occurs as early as possible. Title IV funds are insufficient to provide counseling services for high school students at non-alternative campuses. Although every high school campus employs high school counselors, other demands on these staff limit their availability to provide substance use screening and referral services. A resource assessment should be conducted to determine how high school students are currently accessing substance abuse services and where additional resources are needed.

5. Identify potential repeat disciplinary offenders and institute interventions to prevent recidivism.

Repeat offenders continued to account for a sizeable percentage of the disciplinary events at both middle and high schools. Because such a large percentage of disciplinary offenses are committed by a small percentage of students, efforts to intensify the identification of potential

repeat offenders and provide additional support and services to this group may help to reduce discipline referral rates. The district has in place the Student Intervention Model and Positive Behavior Support and all schools need to ensure fidelity to implementation of the model and make consistent and appropriate use of the Behavioral Program Specialist.

6. Develop a survey that is administered annually to measure school climate and its impact on student behavior.

The Search Institute's Forty Assets Survey conducted several years ago indicated that ASD students averaged less than twenty of the forty positive assets needed for success in school and life. While students verbalize they feel they can talk to their teachers for support, many indicate they do not consistently receive positive verbal and tangible rewards from their teachers.

Additionally, approximately 50% of teachers report that they use established positively stated behavioral expectations in their classroom. Therefore, a locally developed survey to measure school climate and positive assets needed by students for success will be developed and administered online by early Spring 2008.