

143995

143995

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

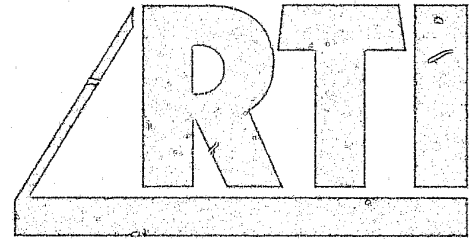
This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the National Institute of Justice.

Permission to reproduce this copyrighted material has been granted by
Public Domain/NIJ

U.S. Department of Justice

to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Further reproduction outside of the NCJRS system requires permission of the copyright owner.



RESEARCH TRIANGLE INSTITUTE

Summary of Findings

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL DISRUPTION AND SCHOOL SOCIAL CONTROL ACTIVITIES

Submitted to:

National Institute of Justice
Grant # 91-BJ-CX-0002

Submitted by:

James J. Collins
Pamela Messerschmidt
Chris Ringwalt

Center for Social Research and Policy Analysis
Research Triangle Institute
P.O. Box 12194
Research Triangle Park, N.C. 27709-2194

January 13, 1992

ABSTRACT

The study examines the prevalence of control and disciplinary activities that U.S. schools engage in, the prevalence of several school disruption factors (alcohol and drug availability at school, presence of gangs at school, student attacks or threats against teachers), and the relationship of the disruption factors to the control and disciplinary activities. Data for the disruption and control factors were collected from a national sample of more than 10,000 public and private school students age 12 and older as part of the 1989 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey—an ongoing survey of U.S. households.

Findings indicate that alcohol and marijuana are perceived to be available at school by more than half of the student respondents. Fifteen to sixteen percent of students said that street gangs were present in their schools or a student had attacked or threatened a teacher in the six months before the interview. Almost all schools engaged in some control and disciplinary activities. Monitoring and patrolling halls and school buildings and grounds were most common. About eight of ten schools do not allow students to leave the school grounds at lunch. The most commonly used drug control activities were teacher or principal patrolling, locker searches and surprise restroom checks. About a quarter of schools used security guards to control alcohol and drug availability. Two-thirds of schools were perceived as likely to suspend students for fighting or drinking at school.

Logistic regression analyses that included school characteristics and indicators of disruption show a direct relationship between disruption and the use of control and disciplinary measures. This suggests schools are reactive rather than proactive in their effort to control the forms of disruption examined. The paper suggests consideration of a more proactive approach but with careful attention given to control efforts so as to minimize negative impacts on schools' educational mission.

I. Introduction

An orderly and safe school environment is essential to maximizing the educational goals of our nation's schools. Unsafe and disorderly schools detract from schools' ability to fulfill the educational mission. About 15 years ago the Safe School Study (SSS), undertaken by the National Institute of Education (NIE), examined patterns of crime and misbehavior in schools and schools' responses to these problems (NIE, 1978). The SSS found a number of school-level factors associated with low rates of student violence and property crime, namely a dedicated and effective principal and a firm, fair, and consistent system of discipline.

The School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which was conducted in 1989, gathered information from students about various disciplinary and control activities undertaken by schools. This supplement to NCVS also asked students to report their perceptions about various problems that might characterize the school setting, including the availability of drugs and alcohol at school, the presence of gangs, and whether there was a recent incident where a student threatened or attacked a teacher at school. The SCS did not gather information at the school level, but individual students did report their perceptions about the control activities and the existence of problems in their school context. These perceptions provide an opportunity to examine the relationships between the control activities and the problems from students' perspective. Unfortunately, findings will not be comparable to those from the Safe School Study, which gathered data at the school level to address the issues. The SCS does, however, provide an opportunity to examine the prevalence of schools' control activities, selected disruptive school influences, and the relationship among these factors.

The study examined the following questions:

- what are the patterns of social control activities in which schools engage, and how do these patterns differ by school characteristics?

- what are the relationships among the various control activities and how strong are these associations?
- what are the relationships among schools' characteristics, their social control activities, and the indicators of disruption?

These questions were addressed so that inferences could be made about schools' initiatives to create safe, secure, and orderly learning environments.

II. Prevalence of Social Control Activities

Table 1 lists the types of social control activities covered by the SCS and the prevalence of each as reported by student respondents. Some of the activities are fairly common in schools, such as teacher hall monitors during class changes, patrols during school hours, and "closed school" policies, i.e. not allowing students to leave the school grounds to eat lunch. Suspensions are relatively common for more extreme forms of rule violations (fighting and drinking or being drunk), but they are less common for lesser violations (being disrespectful to teachers and cutting classes). Concerning drug control activities in particular, a large number of students report patrolling of hallways and grounds by principals or teachers. This matches up with the percentages of those who reported monitoring during class changes and patrolling during school hours above. About one in two students reported locker searches, while about four of ten reported surprise restroom checks. The least common social control activity reported was the presence of security guards for prevention of drugs or alcohol (24%). In all, only 0.5% of the students reported no social control activities at all.

III. School Disorder

Three indicators of school disorder based on students' perceptions were examined:

- the availability of alcohol and drugs at school,
- the presence of gangs at school, and
- whether any student threatened or attacked a teacher at school in the six months before the interview.

Table 1
Prevalence of Social Control Activities

Type of Social Control Activity	Percent
During class changes, teachers stand in doorways and monitor halls	71.7
Someone else patrols hallways during school hours	65.0
Most students must stay on school grounds during lunch	79.0
Students are suspended for being disrespectful to teachers	24.5
Students are suspended for fighting with other students	66.6
Students are suspended for drinking or being drunk at school	68.2
Students are suspended for cutting classes	38.1
School tries to prevent students from having drugs or alcohol by using <u>locker searches</u>	47.9
School tries to prevent students from having drugs or alcohol by using <u>security guards</u>	24.0
School tries to prevent students from having drugs or alcohol by having teachers or the principal <u>patrol</u> halls and school grounds	72.5
School tries to prevent students from having drugs or alcohol by having surprise <u>restroom checks</u>	42.7
Student reported any of the above activities	99.5

Table 2 shows the availability of alcohol and drugs by drug type. About three of ten students thought alcohol and marijuana were easy to obtain at school, and about one in ten thought cocaine and crack were easily available. Sixteen percent to 28%, depending on drug type, thought drugs were impossible to obtain at school. Substantial percentages (22%-37%) did not know whether the various substances were available. Findings for alcohol availability were similar to those for drugs.

Table 2
Availability of Drugs or Alcohol at School, by Type of Drug

Drugs or alcohol at school	Percent of students reporting that obtaining a drug or alcohol at school was				
	Easy	Hard	Impossible	Drug Not Known	Not Known
Alcohol	31%	31%	16%	22%	1%
Marijuana	30	27	16	25	1
Cocaine	11	33	25	31	1
Crack	9	29	28	32	2
Uppers/downers	20	26	17	31	5
Other drugs	14	27	19	37	3

*Row percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Bastian and Taylor, 1991: Table 3.

An initial bivariate analysis of the relationship between drug control measures and availability suggests a direct relationship between these sets of factors. BJS reports that "students attending schools in which drugs were available were more likely than students in schools without drugs to indicate that their schools were taking some action to prevent drug use (91% versus 74%) (Bastian and Taylor, 1991:5). This is not surprising. It is logical to expect that schools with a drug problem would be more likely than schools without a drug problem to take preventive actions. But a more extensive analysis of the relationship in a multivariate framework may be informative and was undertaken.

Fifteen percent of students said there were street gangs present in their schools, almost half of whom said there were sometimes fights between gang members at school. Sixteen percent of the students said that a teacher had been attacked or threatened by a student at school in the previous six months (Bastian and Taylor, 1991:8). Along with the alcohol and drug availability indicators, the gang and teacher attack variables were included in multivariate analyses of their relationships to school control activities.

IV. School Characteristics, Disruption, and Social Control Activities

To examine how school characteristics, the availability of alcohol and drugs at school, and other indicators of potential school disruption vary with social control activities engaged in by schools, we used multivariate analyses. Figure 1 displays our conception of the relationship among them.

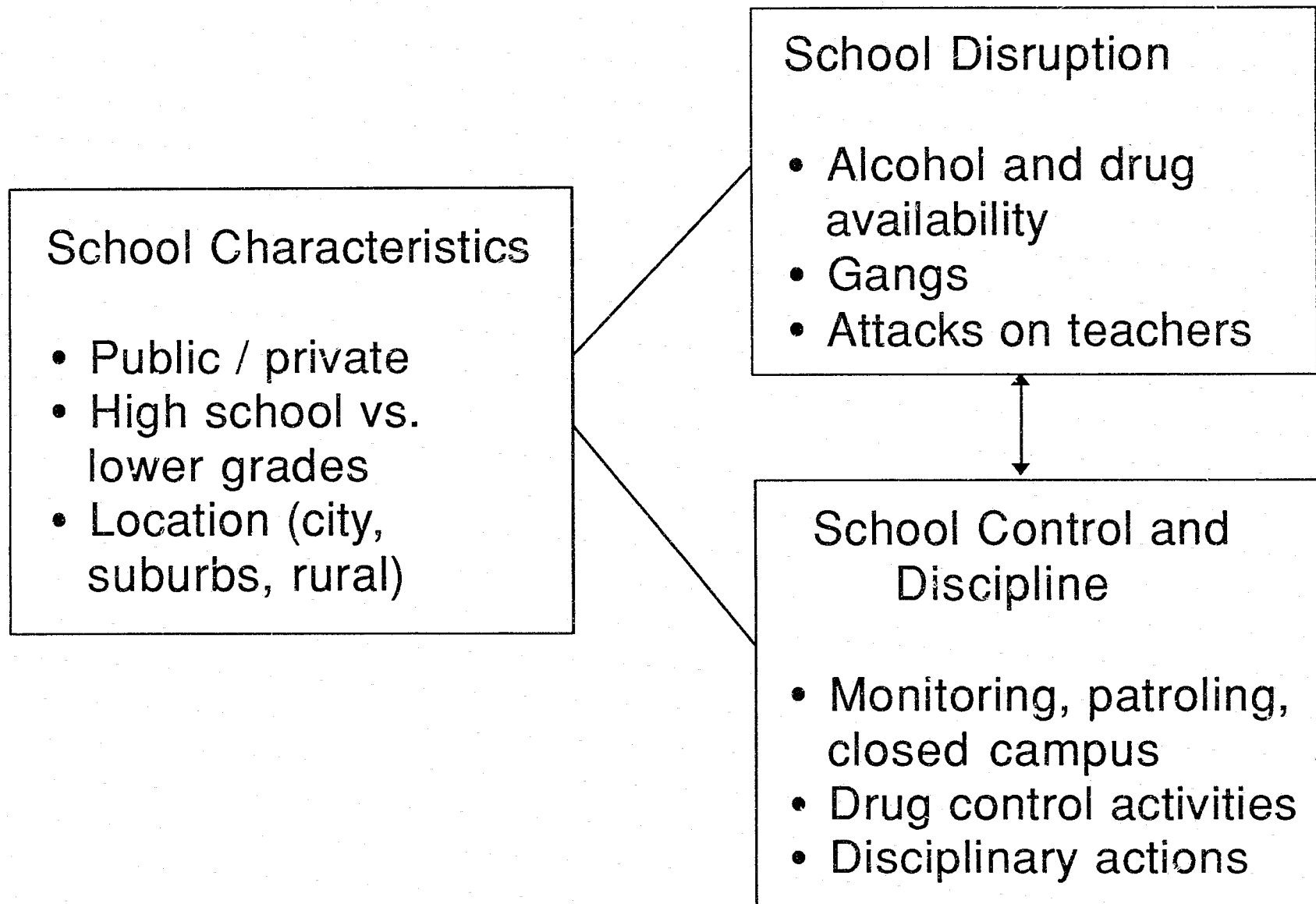
The results indicated that private and public schools differed significantly from each other in their use of the various control and suspension activities. With a single exception, public schools were more likely than private schools to engage in control activities and to suspend students for the four kinds of student misbehavior. An exception was that public schools were less likely than private ones to require students to stay on campus at lunch.

In several of the social control categories, high schools were more likely than schools with lower grades to engage in the various control activities. High schools were more likely to patrol halls, use locker searches, security guards, teacher patrols, and restroom checks as drug control activities and to suspend students for fighting and drinking. High schools were less likely to monitor the halls during class changes and to prevent their students from leaving campus at lunch.

Results were mixed for the relationships between the location of the school and the various control activities. Schools located in cities and suburbs were less likely than schools in rural areas to monitor halls between classes. City schools were less likely than schools in rural areas to utilize locker searches, and to suspend students for drinking at school. City and suburban schools were more likely than rural area schools to utilize security guards and to suspend students for fighting.

There were two significant relationships for the alcohol availability variable. Alcohol was perceived to be available in schools using a teacher or the principal to patrol halls and school

Figure 1.
Schematic of School Disruption and Control



grounds as a drug control activity, and to suspend students for drinking or being drunk at school. Marijuana was seen to be available in schools that used locker searches and surprise restroom checks as drug control activities. Marijuana was also perceived to be available in schools where students thought fighting and drinking would result in suspension. There were two significant findings for cocaine/crack availability. Closed schools were associated with schools where these drugs were not available, but cocaine availability was associated with schools that used security guards as a drug control technique.

The presence of gangs in schools was directly associated with the use of several control activities. Schools with gangs were more than two times as likely as schools without gangs to use security guards. Other direct relationships between gangs and control activities were found for patrolling halls, teacher/principal patrols, surprise restroom checks, and suspension as sanctions for disrespect and fighting. Schools with gangs were less likely to monitor school halls and to have closed campuses.

In schools where one or more teachers were threatened or attacked by students in the six months before the interview there were five significant direct associations with control activities. Threatening or attacking teachers was directly associated with use of security guards and teacher patrols for drug control, and suspension for disrespect, fighting, and cutting class.

In summary, the logistic regression findings indicate:

- public schools and high schools were more likely than their counterparts to engage in most of the control activities. Exceptions were that public schools were less likely than private ones to prevent students from leaving the school campus for lunch, and schools with grades of eight and lower were more likely than high schools to monitor halls during class changes and not to allow students to leave school at lunch.
- city and suburban schools were more likely than rural ones to engage in a number of control activities. Exceptions to this pattern were that city schools are less likely than rural ones to monitor halls during class changes, use locker searches for drug control, and suspend students for drinking or being drunk at school.

Suburban schools were less likely than rural ones to monitor halls during class changes.

- the school disruption indicators (alcohol and drug availability, gangs at school and attacks on teachers) were, with a few exceptions, either directly related or unrelated to the control activities. The exceptions were that monitoring halls during class changes was associated with nonavailability of marijuana at school and the absence of gangs at school. Not permitting students to leave school at lunch was associated with cocaine not being available and the absence of gangs.

The direct relationship of the control activities to the disruption factors suggests two possibilities. The control activities may be after-the-fact or concurrent reactions to the disruption problems, and not proactive attempts to prevent their occurrence. It is also possible that the control activities may themselves contribute to the problems. We think it most likely that the disruption problems themselves generate the control activities, and we are aware of no rationale or evidence to suggest that these activities would exacerbate the problems. Some indirect evidence supports this interpretation. The evidence of relationships of both high schools and schools located in cities and suburbs with the control activities may in part account for the findings. The drug and gang problems are more likely to be manifested among older teenagers who attend high school, and to be found in urban areas. This suggests that the importation of the drug and gang problems into school may be the stimulus for efforts to control these disruptive influences. While this interpretation may be consistent with some of what is known about gangs and drugs, its validity remains to be demonstrated.

A similar argument can be made about attacks against teachers. Violent crime rates tend to be higher in urban than in rural areas so attacks against teachers may also be more common in urban schools, reflecting the community's elevated tendency toward violence. Actual violence or concern about risk of violence may generate increased control activities.

Finally, the use of security guards was one of the stronger correlates of gangs at school and attacks against teachers. This control measure is qualitatively different from the others in that it requires use of non-school personnel. To get authorization and a budget to hire security

guards, and to make the administrative and logistical investment in hiring and supervising guards, suggests a significant level of concern about school safety. It is probably not a social control activity that is undertaken without cause. It is one thing to use existing school personnel to monitor and patrol and to have strict sanctions for students' disciplinary infractions, and another to hire additional resources for monitoring and control. The use of security guards suggests it is an approach in response to existing problems.

V. Implications

The evidence of a direct relationship between the school disruption factors and school control activities provides no evidence that the control activities have preventive or deterrent effects. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that the drug, gang, and teacher attack problems identified here would be worse in the absence of the actions schools take to maintain order. But if our interpretation that the control actions are primarily reactive to the disruption problems is accurate, that suggests some reconsideration of approaches to the maintenance of order in schools is warranted. The Safe School Study found that the safest schools were those governed by a dedicated and effective principal and a firm, fair, and consistent system of discipline. This principal/discipline system suggests a proactive approach to school governance. One implication of our findings in this sense is that schools should consider being more proactive in their control and disciplinary policies and practices. More proactive attempts to control disruption need not involve higher levels of control and discipline at school. Better outcomes might be achieved by the timing and types of measures used, although this paper cannot support specific recommendations in this regard.

There is likely to be some appropriate balance along the proactive/reactive continuum that is optimal for particular schools and school contexts. Too high an emphasis on proactive measures could be counterproductive. Zinsmeister (1990), for example, has suggested that school administrators need to regain control of their schools by using draconian measures such as suspensions, expulsions, guards, and metal detectors. Many school systems, particularly in urban

areas and increasingly in rural areas, have responded to crime by increasing the level and quality of security in and around school grounds. There is some question, however, concerning the long-term effectiveness of such policies: while schools with good security may have less frequent incidents of major disorder, high security helps to perpetuate the perception that violence is a part of schooling and that students should be fearful and anxious at school (Burgan and Rubel, 1980). This may in turn lead to increases in school failure.

Two findings of this paper suggest schools differ markedly from each other in their control and disciplinary activities: school characteristics varied systematically with control activities, and correlations among the control activities were low to moderate. This variation suggests selectivity by schools in their control policies and practices, likely to be due in part to the particulars of schools' own situations. Most school administrators have considerable discretion in the ways that they try to maintain an orderly environment conducive to their educational mission. Administrators might consider exercising their discretion to be more proactive in their control responses.

Finding an optimal level and combination of school control and disciplinary actions is both challenging and important. It is challenging because of the wide range of disruptive and potentially disruptive conditions that exist in schools. In one sense, the student clients of schools are basically unruly—it is a characteristic of young people to be exuberant and sometimes to challenge the status quo. This youthful condition cannot, should not, be the focus for change. Discovering and implementing the most appropriate and effective mix of control and disciplinary activities requires an artful mix of hardheadedness and good judgement.

Discovering the appropriate proactive/reactive control mix is important for the obvious reason that it supports schools' basic educational goals. The social control function of schools can also be thought of in resource terms. Consider that schools have a limited pool of resources to commit to all of their tasks. There are limited physical and financial resources and a finite

number of "person hours" for teachers, administrators and support personnel in a school year. The expenditure of school resources to prevent and control disruption will affect the resource commitment that can be made to education. It is not as simple as we suggest of course, but the careful development and implementation of disciplinary and control activities by schools can ultimately have major effects on the educational mission.

The current analyses suggest future research goals that may be useful. Periodic rounds of the School Crime Supplement, using the same or a similar approach to the previous one would permit assessment of the levels of disruption, use of school control activities, and their relationship to each other over time. This would indicate whether these aspects of American education are changing, and suggest directions for public policy and resource commitments.

Well designed research that addresses the relationships and effects of control and disciplinary actions to disruption and educational achievement would also be helpful. Currently, administrators and teachers operate primarily from an experience model. This approach could be complemented by research findings that identify effective and efficient approaches to the maintenance of order in schools. The present analyses relied on the perceptions of students about disruption and control. This perspective needs to be augmented by information from teachers and administrators. It is not certain that the findings of this paper would be the same if the analyses were based on teacher and administrator perceptions and assessments. New research on school disruption and the use of control and disciplinary actions at school from a teacher/administrator perspective would help to assess the magnitude of the problem and identify appropriate and effective ways of responding.

Bibliography

Burgan, L., & Rubel, R.J. (1980). Public School Security: Yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Contemporary Education, 52, 1, 13-17.

National Institute of Education. (1978). Violent schools-safe schools. The safe school study

report to Congress (Vol. 1). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Zinsmeister, K. (1990). Growing up scared. The Atlantic, 265(6), 49-66.