

# **School safety: The relationship between academic performance, perception of safety and reality**

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# Outline

- Background
- Research Questions
- Methods
- Results
  - Focus groups
  - Archival data

# School Safety Study

- Arizona Dept of Education School Safety Study
  - Legislative mandate
  - Used archival data
  - Wanted to expand the scope and quality

# Research Questions

This study examines the perceptions of students and faculty and compares them to archival data :

- How well do the archival sources of data measure school safety?
- How well are the various sources of data correlated?
- How well do the perceptions of students and faculty reflect the archival school safety indicators?
- How do the perceptions of school safety differ in schools with high standardized test scores from those with low standardized test scores?

# Methods

## Data Sources

- 11 Focus Groups
- Safe and Drug Free School (SDFS) Reports
- Law Enforcement Records

# Focus Groups

- 11 student and 11 teacher groups
- Conducted in Spring 2007
- Schools:
  - Enrollment: 84 - 2,315 students
  - 4 charter schools
  - 6 middle and 5 high schools
  - 4 urban, 2 suburban, 5 rural

School	Enrollment, SY 2005-6	Charter/ Public	Level*	Location	Res.*	AIMS
Alpha	257	Charter	HS	Urban	No	High
Beta	1159	Public	MS	Urban	No	High
Gamma	2315	Public	HS	Suburban	No	High
Delta	670	Public	MS	Suburban	No	High
Epsilon	149	Charter	HS	Rural	No	High
Zeta	455	Public	HS	Rural	No	High
Eta	271	Public	MS	Urban	No	Low
Theta	41	Charter	HS	Rural	No	Low
Iota	125	Charter	HS	Urban	No	Low
Kappa	169	Public	MS	Rural	Yes	Low
Lambda	317	Public	MS	Rural	Yes	Low

# Focus Group

Questions reflected definition of safety.

## Definition of School Safety

A safe school is:

- A place where teaching and learning is not distracted
- A place where disruptions are minimized
- Free from drugs
- Free from violence
- Free from bullying
- Free from fear
- A place where expectations are clearly communicated, consistently enforced, and fairly applied.



# SDFS Reports

Required annual report to ADE

- Measures discipline incidents
- Issues:
  - Not an accurate measure

# Law Enforcement Data

- Incidents reported to law enforcement at the school address
- Issues:
  - Reporting
  - Different systems
  - Availability

# Analysis

1. Focus Groups:
  - Grounded Research Theory
  - Group process
  - Occurred in five waves
  - Assign values
2. Law Enforcement and SDFS Reports :
  - Code to correspond to focus group question
  - Calculate rates

# Focus Group Results

- Students and teachers have similar perceptions of the ADE defined factors of school safety
- Exceptions:
  - Students are more likely to see safety features as evidence of school safety.
  - Students report more disruptive behavior and more risk to property

# Results

## SDFS Data

- Agreement with perceptions varied
  - Example: Reporting styles, bullying

## Crime Data

- Consistently underestimates levels of incidents according to perceptions
  - Example: Assaults

# Findings

- There are schools that have transcended issues of location and neighborhood to provide a safe environment for student learning.
  - Further study of those schools could provide insights for policy makers, program planners, educational leader and educational leadership preparation programs.
- Also, there are schools with few adverse community or neighborhood characteristics where students and teacher report several safety issues.

# Findings

The approach to behavior management taken by administrators and teachers is the major factor that influences the perception of safety of the school.

- Students feel safer when:
  - adults are present
  - there are clear and consistent rules
  - consequences for infractions are consistently and fairly applied.

# Findings

- Marijuana is the drug reported used most often on school grounds.
  - Some teachers have a casual attitude about student marijuana use in school.
  - Most report little or no intervention or discipline for marijuana infractions.



# Findings

- SRO's are more likely to be present on larger, non-charter campuses.
  - However, most teachers and students are unclear about the SRO's role and their contributions to school safety.
- In schools where many students drove to school, parking lots present a safety issue identified by students.

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