

TO: Rochelle W. Martinez

June 26, 2008

THROUGH: Kathy Axt

FROM: Michelle Coon

SUBJECT: Request for Clearance for the Proposed Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) 96: *District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs: 2007-08*

## **Justification**

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education (ED) proposes to employ the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) to conduct a district survey of alternative schools and programs for students at risk of educational failure. The survey was requested by the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDF), U.S. Department of Education to provide a current snapshot of alternative schools and programs for students at risk of educational failure within the nation's public school districts.

This survey will be the second survey conducted by ED to provide nationally representative data about alternative schools and programs for at-risk students. The first survey, conducted in 2001, currently provides the only nationally representative district-level data about alternative schools and programs. Data from the 2001 survey indicated that about 39 percent of public school districts administered at least one alternative school or program for at-risk students, and as of October 1, 2000, 1.3 percent of all public school students were enrolled in a public alternative school or program for at-risk students.

The proposed FRSS study will provide a national profile of alternative schools and programs for students at risk of educational failure within the nation's public school districts for the 2007-08 school year. Some of the topics covered in the 2001 survey are included in this proposed survey. There are, however, some departures from the former survey that correspond to new and emerging issues as indicated in the literature, by experts, and by district-level administrators who participated in feasibility testing of the survey. The proposed survey will cover availability of public alternative schools and programs, enrollment, entry and exit procedures, teacher training requirements, and services offered. Data proposed to be collected as part of the 2007-08 survey will permit comparisons to estimates from 2001 and will expand to issues identified as of interest in the literature.

The FRSS survey, under OMB clearance #1850-0733, is authorized under Section 153 (a) of the Education Science Reform Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-279), which states that the purpose of NCES is "to collect, report, analyze, and disseminate statistical data related to education in the United States and in other nations."

## **Overview of Data Collection**

Westat will collect the information for the Early Childhood, International and Crosscutting Studies Division, NCES, U.S. Department of Education, using the FRSS. Westat is responsible for the questionnaire development; sample design and selection; data collection; telephone follow up; editing, coding, keying, and verification of the data; and production of tabulations and the report detailing the results of the survey.

Since this survey includes some new topics, development work was conducted. This included a review of the literature on alternative schools and programs for at-risk students, two rounds of feasibility calls, and a pretest of the questionnaire. The literature review served to identify existing research data on alternative schools and programs and issues that emerged since the 2001 District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs was conducted that need to be explored. The feasibility calls were conducted in the early design phase of the questionnaire to assess the clarity and relevance of the survey items, and also to gauge whether respondents could answer each question without too much burden. The feasibility calls involved having respondents review the

questionnaire without completing it, and then provide brief verbal feedback by telephone. These calls were conducted between December 2007 and April 2008, and the questionnaire for the second round of feasibility calls was substantially different than in the previous round. We contacted 9 or fewer respondents for each round of calls. Based on the findings from the first round of feasibility calls, the questionnaire was revised and a second round of calls was conducted. This led to a revised survey, which was reviewed by OSDFS and the NCES Questionnaire Review Board (QRB).

Based on feedback from the QRB, the survey was revised and a pretest of the questionnaire was conducted with fewer than 9 respondents to identify problems they might have in providing the requested information. The purpose of the pretest was to verify that all questions and corresponding instructions were clear and unambiguous, to determine if the information would be readily available to respondents, and to determine whether the burden on respondents could be further reduced. Responses and comments on the pretest questionnaire were collected by fax and telephone. Changes to the questionnaire were made based on the feedback received from the pretest, and documented in a memorandum summarizing the pretest results. This revised questionnaire is being submitted with an official request for OMB clearance.

The proposed sample design is a nationally representative sample of approximately 1,800 public school districts from the NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) 2005-06 Local Education Agency (School District) Universe File. The data collection will be accomplished by means of a self-administered survey. Respondents will have the option of completing the survey on a traditional paper and pencil questionnaire or on a Web version of the questionnaire that will be accessed through the Internet. The questionnaire is limited to three pages of information readily available to respondents and can be completed by most respondents in 30 minutes or less. These procedures are typical for FRSS surveys and result in minimal burden on respondents.

Questionnaires and information needed to access the Web survey will be mailed in August 2008 to the superintendent of each sampled school district. Telephone follow up for nonresponse will begin about 3 weeks after the questionnaires have been mailed to the districts. Experienced telephone interviewers will be trained to conduct the nonresponse follow up and will be monitored by Westat supervisory personnel. The response rates for FRSS surveys of district typically have been 90 percent or greater.

## **Data Collection Instrument**

A cover letter (Attachment 1) and questionnaire (Attachment 2) will be mailed to each district. The cover letter requests the participation of the district and introduces the purpose and content of the survey. It also notes that the survey should be completed by the person most knowledgeable about alternative schools or programs for students at risk of educational failure in the district. The cover letter also includes instructions on how to complete and return the survey, as well as contact information in case of queries. Included in the mailing will be information about the option to complete a Web version of the survey.

The survey is structured to collect basic information on alternative schools and programs within the district. In the first section, respondents are asked if there are any alternative schools or programs in their district. If there are no alternative schools or programs in the district, then respondents are asked to complete the respondent information on the cover page and return the questionnaire. Districts in which there are alternative schools or programs continue to the next question that asks for the number of schools and programs in the district. Then respondents are asked how many of the alternative schools or programs in that district are housed within regular schools. Next the questionnaire asks, of the alternative schools and programs in the district in 2007-08, how many a) operated as charter schools, b) were located in juvenile detention centers, and c) used distance education as an instructional delivery mode.

Because the literature and experts indicate that some districts have schools or programs designed to serve specific types of students who need alternative education, the next question asks if, in their district, there were any

alternative schools or programs designed solely for a) students who dropped out of regular school, b) students with substance abuse problems, c) students who were expelled or as an alternative to expulsion, d) students who were involved with the criminal justice system, e) students who were highly disruptive, or f) other students. Respondents are also asked what grades were taught in their district's alternative schools and programs.

In the second section, this survey asks about enrollment in alternative schools and programs. Specifically, the survey asks about the number of students enrolled as of October 1, 2007, the number of students enrolled with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and whether there was any time during the 2007-08 school year in which any of the district's alternative schools and programs were unable to enroll students because of staff or space limitations.

The third section of this survey asks about entry and exit procedures. Respondents are asked whether students in the district can be transferred to alternative schools and programs solely on the basis of various reasons (e.g., possession or use of a firearm; physical attacks or fights). Respondents are also asked about the extent to which students are placed in alternative schools and programs through various means (e.g., through recommendation of district-level administrator, of regular school staff, of a committee, by student or parent request). Further, the survey also asks what happens if a parent objects to a recommendation that a student be placed in an alternative school or program (answer options include, students are placed despite parental objections; the dispute is resolved through due process; the recommendation is withdrawn; or something else). The survey then asks if it is the district's policy to allow students enrolled in alternative schools and programs to return to a regular school in the district. Districts that allow some or all of their students to return to a regular school are asked about the factors that help determine whether a student is able to return to regular school (e.g., improved grades, improved attitude/behavior, student motivation to return). The next question asks about the extent to which students leave to return to regular school, because they graduated with a regular high school diploma, graduated with a nonstandard high school diploma or certificate of completion, transferred to an adult education or GED program, dropped out of school, were transferred to a criminal justice facility, or left for some other reason. The final question in section three asks the respondent to indicate whether their district has a system (e.g., a database) to track students after they leave alternative schools and programs.

The fourth section has two questions about teacher training requirements. Respondents are asked if the district has specific requirements for teaching in an alternative school or program, in addition to regular teacher requirements. In addition, they are asked about whether teachers in an alternative school or program have ongoing professional development requirements beyond those required for all teachers.

The fifth section covers curriculum and services offered. The first question in this section asks whether a written learning plan is required for students who are not special education students upon entry into an alternative school or program in the district. The next two questions ask about collaborations with agencies (e.g., child protective services, community mental health agency) to provide services to student, and about services or practices (e.g., smaller class size than in regular schools, remedial instruction, credit recovery programs/opportunities) required to be made routinely available in alternative schools and programs.

## **Review by Persons Outside the Agency**

All development work occurred in close collaboration with NCES and was reviewed by OSDIFS. The various draft versions of the instrument were also tested with individuals in the field knowledgeable about alternative schools and programs. In addition to multiple rounds of feasibility calls, the questionnaire was most recently pretested through calls to administrators knowledgeable about alternative schools and programs. Based on input from these respondents, NCES, and OSDIFS, the questionnaire was revised and is submitted as Attachment 2 in this official request for OMB clearance.

## Survey Cost

The survey is estimated to cost the Federal government about \$380,000, including about \$350,000 for contractual costs and \$30,000 for salaries and expenses. Based upon costs of past FRSS sample surveys, contractual costs are divided into the subtask costs shown in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1. Estimated contractual costs by subtask

Subtask	Cost
Sampling	10,000
Survey preparation	50,000
Data collection	175,000
Data analysis	40,000
Report preparation and dissemination	75,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>350,000</b>

## Time Schedule

Mailing of the survey is planned for August 2008. About 3 weeks after mailout of the surveys, Westat will begin telephone follow up for nonresponse. Data collection is scheduled for completion about 16 weeks after initial mail out. Exhibit 2 shows the anticipated schedule.

Exhibit 2. Anticipated data collection schedule

	Cumulative workdays	
	From submission to RIMS/OMB	From RIMS/OMB approval
Package to OMB	0	-
Package approved by OMB	30	0
Mail-out of questionnaire	40	10
Telephone Follow up started	55	25
Follow up completed	120	90

## Plan for Tabulation and Publication

Most of the analyses of the questionnaire data will be descriptive in nature, providing NCES, OSDFS, and other data users with tables and appropriate explanatory text. Reports of the findings will be distributed to the data requester, survey respondents, and, upon request, to other interested individuals and organizations, as well as published on the NCES website. Survey responses will be weighted to produce national estimates. Tabulations will be produced for each data item. Crosstabulations of data items will be made with selected classification variables, such as the following.

- District enrollment size (less than 2,500, 2,500-9,999, and 10,000 or more);
- Geographical region (Northeast, Southeast, Central, West);
- Metropolitan status (urban, suburban, rural); and
- Poverty concentration (less than 10 percent, 10 to 19 percent, 20 percent or more).