

**The School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS)  
Principals Focus Groups**

**Volume I  
Supporting Statement**

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Appendix A: Recruitment Script, Consent Form, and Moderator’s Guide

Appendix B: SSOCS brochure and NCES Letter from Commissioner

Appendix C: Sample SSOCS Survey

## **1. Submittal-Related Information**

This material is being submitted under the generic National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) clearance agreement (OMB #1850-0803), which allows NCES to conduct procedures to develop, test, and improve its data collection methodologies (e.g., cognitive interviews, focus groups, feasibility testing, etc.).

## **2. Background and Study Rationale**

The School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS) is a national survey of elementary and secondary public school principals that collects information on school safety, including the frequency of school crime and violence, disciplinary actions, and school practices related to the prevention and reduction of crime. SSOCS is one of the nation's primary sources of school-level data on crime and safety. Conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), it has been administered six times since 2000 to nationally representative samples of schools, most recently during the 2015-16 school year, and will be conducted again in the spring of the 2017-2018 school year. For the SSOCS 2016 collection, completed questionnaires were received from about 2,100 public schools for an unweighted unit response rate of 60%. NCES hopes to improve upon this response rate for the 2018 SSOCS by better understanding the factors that motivate schools to complete (or decline to complete) the SSOCS questionnaire.

This request is to conduct focus groups with school principals to better understand both the barriers and benefits schools tend to associate with participation in surveys like SSOCS and to identify communication strategies that will help schools overcome barriers to participation. This information will guide recruitment strategies and materials development for SSOCS 2018.

## **3. Design and Recruitment**

We will arrange three online focus groups with principals from different states and school districts in public schools, to understand their perceptions of the study and how they would respond if selected for SSOCS. We will work with a recruitment vendor to select a randomized sample of principals and ensure diversity of geography, level (e.g., elementary, secondary), size, and the percentage of students eligible for the National School Lunch Program. Section 3.2 contains more information about the recruitment strategy.

### **3.1 Research Questions**

For principals agreeing to participate in the focus group, we will address the following questions:

- What value does SSOCS have in education?
- Does the format of SSOCS influence principals' motivations to participate?
- What information do principals use when deciding whether or not to participate in a survey like SSOCS? Who do they consult?
- What barriers prevent or discourage participation in SSOCS?
- What would minimize these barriers in the principal's school?
- What factors might motivate principals to participate in a voluntary survey such as SSOCS?
- What are the perceived benefits of participation for principals? How do the principals value SSOCS?
- What current or potential SSOCS messages or materials do principals find relevant, useful, and informative?
- What would be the most effective channels, formats, and materials to use to communicate with principals?
- What other groups (e.g., district, other administrators) would be central to the decision-making process and what would be the best way to reach those influencers?

Using the suggestions and information collected from these focus groups, we will incorporate the principals'

feedback into the development of materials and strategies for engaging schools in SSOCS recruitment in 2018 and beyond. The following materials, which are proposed for use in SSOCS, will be presented to principals prior to and during their focus group to elicit feedback and suggestions (see appendix B for copies of all materials).

Materials for principals' review (to be discussed during the focus groups):

- NCES Letter from Commissioner (Appendix B)
- SSOCS 2015-16 brochure (Appendix B)
- SSOCS sample survey (Appendix C)

### **3.2 Procedures**

Hager Sharp will work with an education-sector recruitment vendor to recruit principal participants for the focus groups. Recruited participants will be sent a package of SSOCS materials in advance of the discussion (see Appendix B and Appendix C). A trained Hager Sharp researcher working from a moderator's guide (see Appendix A) will administer each focus group using an Adobe online conference platform.

To the extent possible, participants will be from schools with characteristics of the schools that tend to decline participation: high- or low-performing schools in varying locales (urban, suburban, town/rural). Each focus group session will include eight to nine principals—a number that allows for in-depth collection of information and buy-in from this audience. Topics of the discussion will focus on identifying the benefits principals associate with SSOCS participation, the barriers they perceive to participating in a study like SSOCS, which SSOCS recruitment strategies and advance materials they believe would be most and least useful, and their suggestions for other types of recruitment strategies or materials. The focus group sessions will last approximately 90 minutes.

### **3.3 Session Activities**

During the focus groups, a moderator will lead the participating principals through a discussion via an online platform, and one to two Hager Sharp team members will observe and take notes on the participants' comments and suggestions, which they will later compile into a summary report. The session will also be audio recorded. The recordings will be destroyed as soon as the report is finalized, and no personally identifiable information will be included in the report.

### **3.4 Analysis Plans**

The report of the focus groups will describe the methodology, participants' responses to the research questions outlined above, recommendations, and suggestions for next steps in order to inform potential revisions to SSOCS recruitment materials and strategies to more effectively recruit schools for participation in the survey.

## **4. Consultations Outside NCES**

Consultations outside NCES include a contractor with expertise in designing and administering focus groups, who will also take part in administering the study: Christina Nicols, MPH, MS, MS, Senior Vice President and Director of Planning, Research and Evaluation at Hager Sharp (1030 15th Street NW, Suite 600E, Washington, DC 20005).

## **5. Assurances of Confidentiality**

All contractor staff working on the SSOCS focus groups will sign the NCES Affidavit of Nondisclosure. Personal information (e.g., name, address) will be collected for recruitment purposes. On the data file used for analyses, respondents will be identified only by a unique study ID number assigned to each participant. Within 48 hours of respondents' participation in the focus groups, the discussion notes will be edited, organized, and cleaned, and all identifiers will be stripped from the data set. All computer files will be

password-protected and hard copies will be locked in secure locations (e.g., data will be in locked file cabinets within locked offices). Only contract staff working directly on the data analysis portion of the project will have access to the data files. Once the final report is created, all personally identifiable information will be destroyed. All presentations of data in reports will be in aggregate form, with no links to individuals.

The statement below will be presented in all written materials (e.g., letters, emails) and read at the start of the focus group sessions. Participants will also be informed that they can leave the discussion at any time.

*NCES is authorized to conduct this study under the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA 2002, 20 U.S.C., § 9543). Your participation is voluntary and your answers may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as required by law (20 U.S. Code, § 9573).*

## 6. Estimates of Burden

Recruitment of principals is estimated to take up to 30 minutes per principal, and we anticipate needing to contact up to 75 principals to form the desired focus groups of a total of 27 diverse participants. The focus groups will take approximately 90 minutes to conduct. There is no cost to participants beyond the participation burden time. Table 1 provides the burden estimate for this study.

**Table 1. Burden estimates for SSOCS principal focus groups**

Respondent group	Hours per respondent	Number of respondents	Number of responses	Total burden hours
Principal – Recruitment	0.5	75	75	38
Principal – Discussions	1.5	27*	27	41
<b>Total Burden</b>		<b>75</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>79</b>

\*Subset of initial contact group, not double counted in the total number of respondents.

## 7. Payments to Respondents

During recruitment, principals, one of the most difficult groups to recruit, will be offered a \$75 incentive for participation. A monetary incentive is deemed necessary both to thank participants for their time and effort and to encourage select types of principals to take part in the focus groups, so that the sample can be as representative as possible of the types of schools that tend to decline participation in SSOCS.

## 8. Estimate of Cost to Federal Government

The estimated cost to prepare for, administer, and report the results of the SSOCS focus groups is approximately \$16,800. This cost includes salaried labor for contractor staff and other direct costs associated with organization of the sessions.

## 9. Schedule

The schedule of activities for the SSOCS principal focus groups is provided in Table 2.

**Table 2. Schedule of activities for the SSOCS principal focus groups\***

Activity	Tasks	Date ranges
Data collection	Recruit participants	By January, 2017
	Web-Ex based focus groups	Early-Mid February, 2017
Analysis	Produce Report	Late February-Early March, 2017