



Evaluation of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Initiative

RTI International has conducted research on crime, violence, justice systems, and behavioral health for over 30 years. Using rigorous multidisciplinary approaches, RTI research advances knowledge and informs policy, practice, and programs nationally and internationally.

Professional backgrounds of RTI researchers span a wide variety of disciplines including criminology, economics, law, psychology, public health, and sociology. Crime, violence, and justice staff are located in RTI's main office in Research Triangle Park, NC, and in offices throughout the United States. RTI maintains a presence in Washington, DC, for consultation on crime, violence, justice, and behavioral health topics.

Overview

The Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) Initiative, funded by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Justice, is an ambitious federal effort to improve the health and well-being of children and adolescents. The Initiative focuses on integrated prevention and treatment programs, strategies, and services designed to reduce violence and substance use among children, promote mental health, and enhance school safety. The SS/HS Initiative has awarded competitive grants to between 20 and 54 sites each year beginning in 1999.

RTI is using two approaches to evaluate this Initiative: conducting a comprehensive cross-site evaluation and supporting consortia of local evaluators who conduct independent evaluations. The goal of these complementary evaluation strategies is to assess the effectiveness of collaborative community efforts to promote safe schools and facilitate healthy child and adolescent development.



Approaches

In the **Cross-site Evaluation**, RTI and its subcontractor, RMC Research Corporation, are conducting both *Process* and *Outcome Evaluations* across the 97 sites funded during the first 3 years of the initiative:

- The *Process Evaluation* (1) provides information on how the Initiative was implemented, (2) gives insight into site attributes and procedures that appear to enhance or impede implementation, (3) examines SS/HS partnership formation and functioning, and the development of policies and provision of services, and (4) helps with the interpretation of findings from the Outcome Evaluation by providing information on why change or lack of change was observed in certain outcomes.
- The *Outcome Evaluation* assesses (1) specific outcomes important to the Initiative, (2) whether outcomes change over time, and (3) the association between key outcomes and planning, programs, and other activities in SS/HS Initiative schools and communities.

The SS/HS Cross-site Evaluation is based on a two-tiered approach: (1) a broad study of all 97 study sites, including annual surveys of teachers, school principals, other school staff, district representatives, partnership members, and

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project directors, plus collection of administrative data from school districts, and (2) a more concentrated study of a randomly selected subset of sites, including student surveys, teacher ratings of individual students, case studies, and a cost analysis.

In the **Evaluation Consortia** approach, sites initially funded in 2002 and 2003 were invited to voluntarily join with other participating sites in small groups to apply for funding to identify and carry out evaluations of common interest. Five groups of local evaluators have received federal funding to study cross-site issues in SS/HS sites. RTI coordinates and monitors these Evaluation Consortia activities.

Findings and Products Generated

SS/HS evaluations provide valuable information on multiple facets of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative, including

- SS/HS partnerships characteristics and effectiveness
- School violence and school safety
- Student substance use/abuse
- School climate
- Mental health services
- Early childhood services
- Cost analysis of local SS/HS Initiative services
- Case studies of individual SS/HS Initiative grantees

In addition to stand-alone reports on each of the above, RTI is preparing a comprehensive final report that will integrate cross-site evaluation findings.

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