

Request for Waiver of Principles of Effectiveness

BACKGROUND

All activities proposed for a Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) plan must meet standards known as “principles of effectiveness.”¹ These standards seek to ensure that state and local entities are held accountable for achieving measurable results. If a district is experiencing unique challenges and has ideas for new approaches that have not been fully tested through scientific research, the district may request a waiver of the SDFSCA requirement that the activity be based on scientifically based research.² The district must demonstrate that the proposed program or activity is innovative and has a substantial likelihood of success.

Addressing cyberbullying and related concerns is clearly a unique new challenge. The following kinds of information are considered necessary to support a waiver of the requirement that a program has been demonstrated to be effective through scientific research

- A needs assessment based on objective data that describes the problems or concerns currently faced.
- A description of the performance measure or measures the program or activity will address.
- The rationale for the program or activity, including how it is designed and why it is expected to be successful in accomplishing the improvements described in the performance measures.

¹Section 4155(a)(1).

²Section 4115(a)(3).

- A discussion of the most significant risk and protective factors the program or activity is designed to target.
- A detailed description of the implementation plan, including a description of how the program or activity will be carried out, the personnel to be involved, the intended audience or target population, and the time frame for conducting the program or activity.
- A detailed description of all costs associated with carrying out the program or activity.
- An evaluation plan that addresses the methods used to assess progress toward attaining goals and objectives; the personnel who will conduct evaluation; the way the results of the evaluation will be used to refine, improve, and strengthen the district's comprehensive plan; and the way progress toward attaining objectives will be publicly reported.
- Evidence to support that the program has a “substantial likelihood of success,” including a description of the prevention research and principles the program is based upon; a description of the results achieved from previous implementation of the activity or program in a setting similar to the one the district is proposing, together with a description of the rigor of evaluation conducted to determine such results; or, if the program has not yet been rigorously evaluated, a description of the plan and timeline for doing so.

The comprehensive plan set forth in Appendix D includes the components necessary to meet the requirements for a waiver of the principles of effectiveness. The following template can be used by districts as a guide for a district request for such a waiver in the event the district desires to use SDFSCA funds to support a response to cyberbullying and cyberthreats.

Request for Waiver Template

[Name] School District requests a waiver of the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act requirement that programs meet the Principles of Effectiveness standard. [Name] School District seeks to use SDFSCA funds to implement and evaluate a comprehensive program to address cyberbullying, cyberthreats, and other Internet use concerns. These new concerns have emerged in recent years as a result of significantly increased youth activity on the Internet and use of cell phones and other personal digital devices.

The approach that will be implemented by [Name] School District has not yet been subjected to rigorous, scientifically based research to determine its effectiveness because the concerns have just recently emerged, and there has been insufficient time to conduct research on effectiveness of strategies.

The comprehensive approach the district will implement has been developed by the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use and is fully outlined in the book *Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: Responding to the Challenge of Online Social Aggression, Threats, and Distress*. This book describes the challenges and the prevention research and principles upon which the approach is based. A copy of the book can be provided upon request.

This approach incorporates key components of programs that have been determined to be successful in preventing face-to-face bullying—specifically, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, along with current practices in threat assessment, as recommended by the U.S. Secret Service, and with suicide prevention plans. The approach additionally incorporates components necessary to address the management of technology use in schools, issues related to the ways in which youth are using and misusing technologies, and legal restrictions on school-imposed discipline that result from free-speech protections for student off-campus speech.

Further, the approach implemented by the district will incorporate ongoing evaluation and analysis, which will provide insight into the effectiveness of the program and the opportunity to modify the program when necessary. The district will remain in communication with the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use to both provide and gain updated recommendations on effective strategies to address these concerns.

Needs Assessment

[Name] School District has conducted two types of needs assessment:

- *Student Survey.* This survey, administered to selected middle and high school students, assessed the following: general information, Internet use, parent or guardian involvement in Internet use, personal experiences and insight into other students' experiences with cyberbullying and other concerns, bystander behavior, and reporting behavior.
- *Staff Assessment.* The staff needs assessment assessed the degree to which safe schools and educational technology personnel perceive problems. This assessment solicited insight into perceptions about the adequacy of current school policies and implementation of those policies, Internet use management issues, and reporting and response concerns.

The results of the needs assessments are attached. These results indicate significant concerns related to student involvement in cyberbullying, as well as some concerns related to cyberthreats.

Comprehensive Plan of Action

The attached comprehensive plan of action has been developed by [specify—probably a work group consisting of members of the district safe schools committee and educational technology committee]. This plan of action has been reviewed and approved by [specify—probably the full district safety committee, including community members, the district educational technology committee, and the district leadership council].

The comprehensive plan of action includes the following:

- Objectives
- Rationale and protective factors
- Action steps

- Responsibilities
- Time line
- Costs
- Assessment and evaluation plan

Substantial Likelihood of Success

There is a substantial likelihood of success in the implementation of this program because it is grounded in research and principles that are known to be effective in reducing bullying behavior, as well as insight into the emerging concerns. Further, a comprehensive evaluation approach has been built into the plan of action, and the [Name] School District will be communicating regularly with others who are also implementing this program to exchange information about effective strategies.