Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Advisory Committee
Local Education Perspective

Presentation By:

Clarence David Jones
Coordinator
Safe and Drug-Free Youth Section
Fairfax County Public Schools
8115 Gatehouse Road
Falls Church, VA 22042

Currently as implemented, what are the strengths of the SDFSCA State Grant Programs? What are the elements of the State Grants program that are working and addressing the needs of students and schools today?

- Funding from the SDFSCA has provided at the LEA level the opportunity to use a combination of science-based prevention programs from the pre-school level to the 12th grade and to continue these prevention efforts throughout the community that we serve.

- A key strength of the State Grant programs has enabled schools and community organizations to combine their efforts to expand prevention efforts. Through this channel, schools and communities are able to reach sections of the community where adults without school age children can participate in the prevention of negative behaviors.

- SDFSCA has provided school systems, both large and small, the ability to provide their students and staff the most up-to-date prevention strategies, the ability to train together, to share resources across schools, community, and local agencies, and to leverage these resources to enhance their programs within their systems.

- One main element of the LEA's responsibility is to meet the Principals of Effectiveness (POE). The POE gives the LEA the ability to use the SDFSCA funding in such a way that it can be assessed, grounded in scientifically-based research, measured, and provide feedback in order to enhance their programs.

Is the SDFSCA State Grant Program working effectively to promote safe and drug-free schools across the country, specifically in rural, urban, and suburban settings? What are the difficulties in determining the effectiveness of the program? Are there mechanisms that could be proposed that would help determine if programs being supported with SDFSCA State Grants program funds are effective in meeting program purposes?

- In Fairfax County the answer is yes! We continue to prove our programs are working. On the recent survey of over 13,000 students, our youth survey shows a decrease in alcohol and drug use. It also shows that we are under the National average for the second time in the past three surveys.

- The effectiveness of these programs can be attributed to the schools and community agencies working together to form school community coalitions to expand the prevention efforts. It is through these coalitions that we engage individuals who normally would stand on the side watching to get involved in their individual community prevention efforts.

- The most difficult part of determining if a system-wide program is effective is to get local political leaders agreeing to accomplish a student risk survey every other year. Seven years ago, we passed that hurdle and the resulting surveys have provided us with the data and tools we needed to continue to show progress on decreasing substance use and risky behavior for our youth.

- The Virginia Department of Education (VADOE) Safe and Drug-Free School Office requires each LEA to do a yearly progress report to determine if their programs are effective. These reports, along with local surveys, have provided VADOE with the data and insight into the effectiveness of each school system and how they put to use these SDFSCA State Grant funding.

- The VADOE also requires each LEA to submit an application to receive the SDFSCA State Grant funding and in turn these applications go through a peer review committee to ensure that they meet the federal requirements prior to approval of any funding. Those that do not meet these requirements must resubmit with suggested corrections from the committee in order to receive its school system SDFSCA State Grant funding.

Are there emerging issues facing students and schools today that the SDFSCA State Grant Program does not address and should they be addressed in the SDFSCA State Grant Program?

- The SDFSCA State Grant Program is set up to adjust to changing trends and issues that may occur. One of the purposes of the POE is to periodically evaluate and use the results to refine, improve, and strengthen programs to meet the needs of the system and community.

The SDFSCA State Grant Program includes a focus on safety. Sec. 4114 (d)(7) states that recipients of the SDFSCA State Grants must have "a plan for keeping schools safe and drug-free" including, a "crisis management plan". Considering the Nation's focus on emergency response and crisis planning is this language sufficient to address the concern for crisis management in our schools or are further guidance or other steps necessary to address this concern?

- This language and the guidance that is given are good and no additional information is needed. If in the future it does require adjustment, the LEA will work with their SEA to accomplish this change.

Is the structure of the SDFSCA State Grant Program (awarding funds to the State Education Agency and the Governor), the most effective mechanism for the use of these funds?

- I believe this is the best way to distribute these funds.

Is the balance between flexibility and accountability contained in the statute working? Could State and local flexibility be balanced with additional core requirements that would encourage LES's to address specific issues?

- The ability for LEA's to be flexible has allowed LEA's to pinpoint the issues within their own communities. With the continuation of decreased funding, this flexibility gives the LEA the ability to reevaluate programs and prioritize based on the issues and funding required. This would allow for accountability on programs funded.

- Additional core requirements with a decreasing funding source would not be advised.

How can the tension between the Principles of Effectiveness provisions that requires that funds be spent on research-based activities and the broad list of authorized activities (many of which lack a strong research base) be resolved?

- The waiver system is one that has eased some of the tensions on this topic. ***LEA's can apply to the State to allow innovative activities or programs that demonstrate substantial likelihood of success.***

- LEA's are continuing to collect data to evaluate their programs. The POE requires this data to be collected and used to evaluate their efforts.

- One key component of the POE that seems to be overlooked in many discussions is "including meaningful and ongoing consultation and input from parents in the development of your application and administration of the program or activity". This element alone brings so much accountability to an LEA's program. When parents, communities, and other agencies adopt a

program that is evaluated and been proven to make a difference in their community, then that is the key.

- Ongoing discussions between agencies such as USDOE, NIDA, OJJDP, CADCA, SAMHSA, and others would help ease some of the tension when it comes to programs that overlap.