

Presentation to the SDFSC Advisory Committee Monday, August 21, 2006  
Research Panel  
Zili Sloboda, Sc.D.  
Senior Research Associate  
Institute for Health and Social Policy  
The University of Akron

## Introduction

Before I begin addressing the questions that were submitted for comment, I want to provide a context for my responses.

- The Monitoring the Future Study data for the last fifteen years has shown that the proportion of students reporting illicit drug use increases between 150% and 200% between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, indicating that prevention needs to occur in elementary school as well as when students are most at risk in middle and high schools.
- While at the National Institute on Drug Abuse and currently through my research working with 83 school districts including 83 high schools and 122 middle schools, I have found that school administrators are concerned about drug use and want to address this issue but many do not understand what prevention is and how it works and how prevention can “fit” into the school schedule, nor are they able to determine what programs are best for their students. Therefore more information needs to be provided to assist them in making decisions about the placement of prevention programming.
- We know from epidemiologic studies that not only do drug use patterns change over time, but also children’s and adolescents’ ‘cultures’ also change. Prevention programming then needs to be flexible enough to address these changes in order to be salient in young peoples’ lives.

## Addressing the Questions

1. Currently as implemented, what are the strengths of the SDFSCA State Grants Program? What are the elements of the State Grants Program that are working and addressing the needs of students and schools today?

I see several strengths of the SDFSCA State Grants Program:

- By its existence, it emphasizes the importance of drug use as a problem that schools and communities must address
- It provides funding for school districts across the country to focus on drug use in their schools and this funding can serve as a basis upon which additional funds can be made available from state and local sources
- The elements of the State Grants Program have the potential to support a prevention delivery system across schools through state-level agencies. Under Sec. 4112 (c) State Activities a number of components of such a system are listed including: “(i) identification, development, evaluation and dissemination of drug and violence prevention strategies, programs, activities, and other information: (ii) training, technical assistance, and demonstration projects...” and the development

of a uniform management information and reporting system. Such a data system has the potential to not only focus on long-term outcomes but would also include intermediate outcomes and elements of how and to whom the program was delivered. Such a system would serve to assess how programs are being delivered and would identify areas where additional training or technical assistance or some other intervention is required.

2. Is the SDFSCA State Grants 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 meeting program purposes?

The way that the SDFSCA State Grants Program is designed, it has the potential to reach every school district across the country. The real issue relates to how best to determine whether the program is effective. The careful development of the uniform management information and reporting system in conjunction with periodic independent evaluations that focus on specific issues arising from the information and reporting system would serve as an administrative tool to determine the effectiveness of the program and to make ongoing changes where needed. However, the system should be built with the aim of developing a minimal data set and with the recognition that drug use generally begins at low levels in middle school and increases dramatically by the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades so that immediate changes in drug use may not occur until one to two years after a preventive intervention.

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

It seems to me that Title IV is comprehensive and sufficient to meet current needs.

4. The SDFSCA State Grants 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 in this language sufficient to address the concern for crisis management in our schools or is further guidance or other steps necessary to address this concern?

I don’t feel qualified or informed sufficiently about the issue to answer this question.

5. Is the structure of the SDCFCA State Grants Program (awarding funds to the State Education Agency and the Governor), the most effective mechanism for the use of these funds?

The current mechanisms for funding are appropriate and the arrangement assures connecting key state agencies to local school districts and centralizing the flow of information, training as needed, and monitoring.

6. 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 LEAs to address specific issues?

The balance between flexibility and accountability is always a problem. However, if developed properly, the uniform management information and reporting system could serve to assist the schools, as well as the state governments and ED to monitor how programs are being delivered and where problems may arise that need to be addressed.

7. How can the tension between the Principles of Effectiveness provisions that require 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 tension exists between the Principles of Effectiveness and the “authorized activities” because the “authorized activities” appear to be mandated while the provisions of the Principles of Effectiveness are guidelines for effective programming. Furthermore, the “authorized activities” are dated and therefore limited. To have more flexibility the “list” should be eliminated and a better system for diffusion and dissemination of research findings needs to be developed.