



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs

National Institute of Justice

Washington, D.C. 20531

April 6, 2016

Dear Colleague:

This Dear Colleague Letter alerts all interested parties to additional topics and research questions of high priority and particular interest to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) as part of its Comprehensive School Safety Initiative (CSSI). The topics and research questions described in this letter provide greater specificity, but remain consistent with the funding categories, priorities, and guidance described in the full CSSI solicitation (available at <http://www.nij.gov/funding/Documents/solicitations/NIJ-2016-9093.pdf>). Many of the items listed below focus on school discipline, and are particularly germane to applicants for funding Category 1: Developing Knowledge About What Works to Make Schools Safe and funding Category 3: Shorter Term Studies on School Safety. However, potential applicants for all funding categories are encouraged to review and consider these items.

1. NIJ has a strong interest in understanding and reducing disparities on the basis of race, national origin (including English Learners), sex, and disability in the administration of school discipline. With regard to disability, NIJ is particularly interested in discipline disparities for students with behavioral and mental health disabilities. NIJ encourages those applying for funding under Category 1 to incorporate programmatic performance measures and evaluation measures to assess, and where applicants are developing responsive programs, seek to remedy, any potential disproportionalities stemming from disciplinary policies, practices, and procedures.
2. NIJ encourages applicants under funding Category 1 to develop and evaluate pilot programs that involve stakeholders — school districts, courts, law enforcement (including police, sheriff's departments, and district attorneys' offices), public defenders, family and child welfare system personnel, and communities (e.g., parents, students, local leaders) — working together to develop school-based protocols that allow for graduated sanctions for students' misbehavior and limit school-based arrests.
3. NIJ similarly encourages applicants under funding Category 1 to develop and evaluate pilot programs that involve these same stakeholders (school districts, courts, law enforcement, public defenders and prosecutors, family and child welfare personnel, and communities) working together to build diversion programs that reduce misbehavior of students while (1) minimizing the severity of negative outcomes for students (e.g., arrest, secure detention, adjudication); (2) encouraging positive outcomes (counseling, community-based alternatives to secure programs); and (3) minimizing costs to schools and the justice system.

4. Under funding Category 1, NIJ seeks proposals for a model school behavior and discipline data system that: (1) considers what information a school would want and need to collect (e.g., student demographic information, incident information, referral information, consequence information, information about any SRO involvement, outcomes information); (2) determines how best to collect it (including methods to standardize teacher and administrator data entry); (3) allows for layperson-friendly data analytics modeling so educators can understand and use their own discipline data; (4) includes and shares information as appropriate from other public agencies, while complying with FERPA, HIPAA, and other federal laws that implicate student privacy.
5. NIJ is interested in the activities and functions of School Resource Officers (SROs) and other law enforcement and security officers operating in schools and in coordination with schools. NIJ encourages applicants for funding under Category 3 to consider:
 - How are SROs and other law enforcement officers trained to operate in K-12 public schools? On what topics do they receive training? How does their training compare to their actual duties? What structural method of providing training is most effective (e.g., online, episodic, in-person, with follow-up coaching, mandatory training, voluntary interests-based training)?
 - What are the criteria that are being used to select law enforcement officers to operate in schools?
 - How are the activities (e.g., mentoring, educational activities, use of force that does not result in arrest) by SROs and other law enforcement officers being documented, beyond documentation of arrests? Which entity (i.e., the school district? the police department?) is documenting those activities, and in what form?
 - How are law enforcement officers operating in schools supervised by their own department and/or by the school(s) in which they operate? What criteria are used to assess officer performance?
 - To what extent are SROs and other law enforcement officers involved addressing school disciplinary matters that do not rise to the level of criminal activity? How are those situations initiated and handled? Who initiates SRO involvement and why?
 - Are there differences in SRO turnover, discipline disparities, or arrest rates when comparing between school districts that have their own police departments, school districts that have MOUs or contracts with local law enforcement, and school districts that do not have formal arrangements with local law enforcement?
 - Similarly, do SRO assignment patterns (assigned to one school, assigned to several schools, roving, assigned to a “beat”) affect SRO turnover, discipline disparities, or arrest rates?

- For SRO programs that are implementing (i.e., adding) fines, fees, or ticketing in program of graduated sanctions, what is the impact of those sanctions on school-based arrest rates?
6. NIJ is interested in applications related to school discipline and safety issues in Indian Country, including studies and pilot programs that address issues related to understanding and reducing school discipline disparities, school to prison pipeline issues, and school-based arrest.
 7. NIJ encourages proposals for studies and pilot programs to understand and reduce disciplinary disparities for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students in schools in proximity to Indian Country.
 8. NIJ is seeking proposals for descriptive and comparative studies that analyze the sequence of events and decisions that lead from a school-related incident, to an arrest, to juvenile or adult court involvement and disposition.
 9. NIJ seeks applications for studies that examine school pushouts (i.e., all of the reasons students are removed from the general education environment, regardless of educational justification). Such research might describe and analyze the spectrum of circumstances, consequences, and alternative education options available for students who experience school pushout, including, but not limited to, a self-contained classroom, in-school suspension, out of school suspension, an alternative school, a cyber-charter, educational services during expulsion, a partial hospitalization program, a residential treatment facility, a juvenile justice facility, etc.

For more information about NIJ's Comprehensive School Safety Initiative, please see <http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/school-crime/Pages/school-safety-initiative.aspx>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Rodriguez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nancy" and last name "Rodriguez" clearly legible.

Nancy Rodriguez, Ph.D.
Director
National Institute of Justice