



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

DATE: January 23, 2009  
TO: Rochelle W. Martinez  
THROUGH: Kathy Axt  
FROM: Kashka Kubzdela  
SUBJECT: Request for Clearance for the Proposed FRSS Follow-up District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs: 2007-08

## Justification

NCES is requesting clearance to conduct a follow-up data collection to the District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs for students at-risk of educational failure. Under the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), NCES collected data between August 19, 2008 and December 19, 2008 with the *District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs: 2007-08* (O.M.B. No. 1850-0733), hereafter referred to as the initial 2007-08 survey. The initial 2007-08 survey was requested by the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS), U.S. Department of Education, to provide a snapshot of alternative schools and programs for students at risk of educational failure within the nation's public school districts. The initial 2007-08 survey is the second survey conducted by ED to provide nationally representative data about alternative schools and programs for at-risk students.

The initial 2007-08 survey was mailed to a stratified sample of approximately 1,800 public school districts selected from the 2005-06 NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) Local Education Agency (School District) Universe File. Instructions to district superintendents indicated that the survey should be completed by the person most knowledgeable about alternative schools and programs for students at-risk of educational failure within that school district. The survey had a response rate of 95 percent.

In addition to district-administered alternative schools and programs, alternative education for students at risk of educational failure can be provided through alternative schools and programs administered by entities other than the district. These schools and programs can be in place of or in addition to alternative schools and programs administered by the district. During data collection on the initial 2007-08 survey, Westat, our data collection contractor, received phone calls and notes from districts inquiring and commenting about such delivery approaches. Examples include regional programs, consortia, and privately run sites contracted by the district.

The initial 2007-08 survey provides nationally representative data about alternative schools and programs administered by the district. However, it does not provide information about alternative schools and programs administered by entities other than the district. Thus, a more complete picture of the total number of alternative schools and programs and the total number of students served would be obtained if additional information is collected about alternative schools and programs administered by entities other than the district. This additional data would provide information beyond the scope of what the initial 2007-08 survey provides, and would not replace existing data about district administered programs. NCES would like to take this opportunity to conduct a short follow-up survey to learn more about these alternative schools and programs administered by entities other than the district. Specifically, the proposed survey will provide national estimates of the proportion of public school districts that used alternative schools and programs administered by entities other than the district during the 2007-08 school year, what entity administered the alternative education (e.g., regional program, consortia,

cooperative, another district, or privately run schools or programs contracted by the district), and the number of students enrolled in alternative schools and programs administered by entities other than the district.

The FRSS survey, under OMB clearance #1850-0733, is authorized under Section 153 (a) of the Education Science Reform Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-279), which states that the purpose of NCES is “to collect, report, analyze, and disseminate statistical data related to education in the United States and in other nations.”

## **Overview of Data Collection**

Westat will collect the information for the Early Childhood, International and Crosscutting Studies Division, NCES, U.S. Department of Education, using the FRSS. For FRSS surveys, Westat is responsible for the questionnaire development; sample design and selection; data collection and processing; and production of tabulations and the report detailing the results of the survey.

For the follow-up survey, the proposed sample is all respondents of the initial 2007-08 survey. The sample design of the initial 2007-08 survey was a nationally representative sample of approximately 1,800 public school districts from the NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) 2005-06 Local Education Agency (School District) Universe File. The survey was self-administered and respondents had the option of completing the survey on a traditional paper and pencil questionnaire or on a Web version of the questionnaire that could be accessed through the Internet. The initial 2007-08 survey was limited to three pages of information readily available to respondents that could be completed by most respondents in 30 minutes or less. Data collection was conducted from August to December 2008, and had a 95 percent response rate. The proposed follow-up survey will be in a self-administered paper format, one page in length, with an estimated response burden of 5 minutes.

Using the respondent contact information collected on the initial 2007-08 survey, the follow-up questionnaire and cover letter will be mailed in March 2009 to the respondent who completed the initial 2007-08 survey. Telephone follow-up for nonresponse will begin about 3 weeks after the questionnaires have been mailed to the districts. Experienced telephone interviewers will be trained to conduct the nonresponse follow-up and will be monitored by Westat supervisory personnel.

Since this follow-up survey is a new topic, development work was conducted. This included informal telephone discussions with four respondents who indicated in notes provided on the questionnaire or interviewer call record that their district used alternative schools or programs administered by an entity other than their district. These discussions provided background knowledge used to develop survey items for the pretest. These informal calls were conducted between December 11, 2008 and December 15, 2008.

A pretest of the questionnaire was conducted with 6 respondents to identify problems they might have in providing the requested information. The purpose of the pretest was to verify that all questions and corresponding instructions were clear and unambiguous, to determine if the information would be readily available to respondents, and to determine whether the burden on respondents could be further reduced. Responses and comments on the pretest questionnaire were collected by fax and telephone. Changes to the questionnaire were made based on the feedback received from the pretest and documented in a memorandum summarizing the pretest results. This revised questionnaire is being submitted with this request for OMB clearance.

## **Data Collection Instrument**

A cover letter (Attachment 1) and questionnaire (Attachment 2) will be mailed to each district that responded to the initial 2007-08 survey. The cover letter thanks the respondent for completing the initial 2007-08 survey, requests their participation in the follow-up survey, and introduces the purpose and content of the follow-up survey. The cover letter also indicates that the survey should be completed by the respondent who completed the initial survey in the fall 2008, as well as instructions on how to complete and return the survey. Contact information is provided in case of queries.

The survey is structured to collect basic information on alternative schools and programs that are administered by entities other than the district. First, there is an introductory section briefly explaining the reason for the follow-up survey. Respondents are then asked if there were any students enrolled in their district who attended an alternative school or program that was administered by an entity other than their district during the 2007-08 school year. If there were no students enrolled in their district who attended an alternative school or program administered by an entity other than the district, then respondents are asked to complete the respondent information on the cover page and return the questionnaire. Respondents who indicate that there were students enrolled in their district who attended alternative schools or programs in 2007-08 administered by an entity other than the district, continue to the next question, which asks how many students were enrolled in those alternative schools and programs. Finally, in the third question, respondents are asked to indicate what entity administered these alternative schools and programs.

## **Review by Persons Outside the Agency**

The instrument was pretested through calls to respondents of the initial 2007-08 survey. Based on input from these respondents, the questionnaire was revised and is submitted as Attachment 2 in this request for OMB clearance.

## **Survey Cost**

The survey is estimated to cost the Federal government about \$110,000, including about \$100,000 for contractual costs and \$10,000 for salaries and expenses. Contractual costs are primarily for data collection, since the existing sample from the initial 2007-08 survey will be used, and the data from the follow-up survey will be combined into one report with the data from the initial 2007-08 survey.

## **Time Schedule**

Mailing of the survey is planned for March 2009. About 3 weeks after mailout of the surveys, Westat will begin telephone follow up for nonresponse. Data collection is scheduled for completion about 12 weeks after initial mail out. Exhibit 1 shows the anticipated schedule.

## Exhibit 1. Anticipated data collection schedule

	Cumulative workdays	
	From submission to RIMS/OMB	From RIMS/OMB approval
Package to OMB	0	-
Package approved by OMB	30	0
Mail-out of questionnaire	40	10
Telephone follow up started	55	25
Follow up completed	100	70

## Plan for Tabulation and Publication

Most of the analyses of the questionnaire data will be descriptive in nature and will include both the initial 2007-08 survey data as well as data from the follow-up survey, providing OSDFS and other data users with tables and appropriate explanatory text. Reports of the findings will be distributed to the data requester, survey respondents, and, upon request, to other interested individuals and organizations, as well as published on the NCES website. Survey responses will be weighted to produce national estimates. Tabulations will be produced for each data item. Crosstabulations of data items will be made with selected classification variables, such as the following.

- District enrollment size (less than 2,500, 2,500-9,999, and 10,000 or more);
- Geographical region (Northeast, Southeast, Central, West);
- Metropolitan status (urban, suburban, rural); and
- Poverty concentration (less than 10 percent, 10 to 19 percent, 20 percent or more).

## Statistical Methodology

The sample for the proposed FRSS follow-up survey on alternative schools and programs will be the 1,699 districts that responded to the initial 2007-08 survey. The sample for the initial 2007-08 survey included 1,806 public school districts in the United States (50 states and the District of Columbia). These districts were selected from the frame of 13,799 regular public school districts created from the 2005-06 NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) Local Education Agency Universe file, which was the most current file available at the time of selection. For purposes of this study, “regular” school districts included any local school district that was not a component of a supervisory union (i.e., Education Agency type 1 on the CCD) or was a local school district component of a supervisory union sharing a superintendent and administrative services with other local school districts (i.e., Education Agency type 2 on the CCD). Excluded from the sampling frame were districts in the outlying U.S. territories and districts with no enrollments or missing enrollments.

Approximately 18 percent of the 13,799 districts in the CCD frame have at least one alternative school listed in the corresponding 2005-06 CCD public school universe file. This information about alternative schools was used to create two major categories of districts for sampling: districts with alternative schools on the CCD frame and districts without alternative schools on the CCD frame. Although the remaining 82 percent of districts do not have any alternative schools in the CCD file, the FRSS study on alternative schools and programs conducted in 2001 suggested that about 40 percent of all regular school districts actually do operate either alternative schools or alternative programs for students at risk of educational failure.

The school district sampling frame was stratified by the presence or absence of alternative schools in the CCD file and whether or not the district serves only elementary grades. Within each of the four categories created by this cross-classification, the sample was allocated to size strata in rough proportion to the aggregate square root of the enrollment in the stratum. Districts in the sampling frame were then sorted by metropolitan status (urban,

suburban, rural) and region (Northeast, Southeast, Central, West) to induce additional implicit stratification. Within each primary stratum, districts were selected systematically and with equal probabilities.

Of the 1,806 districts in the sample for the initial 2007-08 survey, 9 districts were found to be ineligible for the survey because they had merged with another district. This left a total of 1,797 eligible districts in the sample. Completed questionnaires were received from 1,699 districts, or 95 percent of the eligible districts. These 1,699 districts will be the sample for the proposed follow-up survey.

The data from the follow-up survey will be combined with the data from the initial survey for analysis and reporting. Because of the very brief nature of the follow-up survey, it is anticipated that all of the districts that responded to the initial will also respond to the follow-up survey. If a district does not respond to the follow-up survey, the missing information will be treated as item nonresponse and imputed in accordance with NCES guidelines.

Adam Chu, Senior Statistician, Westat, (301) 251-4326, was consulted about the statistical aspects of the design.