

THE HANDBOOK
OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE
AND SCHOOL SAFETY

From Research to Practice

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The SRS Safe Schools Survey: A Broader Perspective on School Violence Prevention

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Self-report school safety surveys, in which students rate their perceptions of violence and their personal sense of safety at school, are among the most important tools in school violence assessment (Furlong & Morrison, 1994, 2000). The direct approach represented by student surveys offers a more practical measure that also affords a measure of anonymity to students (Fitzgerald & Mulford, 1986; Kingery, Coggeshall, & Alford, 1998); yet the use of self-report as a measure of school violence is not without criticism. In addition to general concerns about the accuracy of self-report (Bruce & Desmond, 1997), particular concerns have also been raised about high rates of incomplete or unreliable responding (Cornell & Loper, 1998; Rosenblatt & Furlong, 1997).

An important yet relatively unexplored issue for school safety survey may be *construct validity*; that is, the extent to which the measure fully and accurately captures the domain of school safety and school violence. National surveys of school violence (Chandler, Chapman, Rand, & Taylor, 1998; Kann et al., 2000) tend to focus primarily on more dramatic violence (e.g., fights with weapons, drug usage). Yet, national reports and consensually validated models of school violence prevention suggest that lower intensity, higher frequency events such as minor disruption, bullying, or incivility may be more important in predicting overall school safety (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002). Additionally, although it is typically assumed that certain events or behaviors, such as weapons possession, are highly influential in determining whether a school is perceived to be safe, little is actually known about which factors contribute the most to students' perceptions of safety or violence.