Title: School Characteristics Related to In-School Substance Use

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Abstract:

The purpose of the present investigation was to identify risk factors for substance use by examining school characteristics and practices that are related to severe substance use problems in school. In this study we asked: What demographic characteristics of schools are related to high substance use problems? What characteristics of the school climate are related to school substance use? Is there a relationship between the level of discipline in a school and the level of substance use problems? What other school-level problems are related to substance use?

By grade 12, most students have used alcohol and marijuana. Research shows that about one-third of high school students report seeing fellow classmates under the influence of alcohol or marijuana at school, and have been offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property Despite the vast amount of research that has been conducted about overall substance use, drug and alcohol use in school has been understudied.

Data for this investigation consisted of 896 schools from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88). High- and low-problem schools were compared, variable by variable, on demographic characteristics, measures of academic climate, and disciplinary policies. Severe alcohol problems were reported by 35% of the schools and illegal drug use was a significant problem in 21% of the schools. Among schools that reported high alcohol problems, 54% also reported high drug problems. Among schools with high drug problems, most (91%) also had alcohol problems suggesting that alcohol is a strong precursor of drug use.

This investigation found that alcohol and drug problems are not equally likely to occur in all types of schools. Alcohol and drugs were more problematic in schools with predominantly white student bodies and in suburban schools. Drug use was more problematic in public schools, but alcohol problems were unrelated to school type. Schools where there is high morale among teachers and students and where students are academically motivated were less likely to experience either alcohol or drug problems than schools with negative emotional climates. In schools with strict disciplinary policies for alcohol use, fewer alcohol-related problems were reported.