Many critics agree that the SDFSCA program is deeply flawed and needs restructuring to encourage more-effective programs, efficient oversight, and better targeting of funds.\textsuperscript{1} This chapter summarizes various issues identified in our literature review or cited by focus group and conference participants. Some of these issues have proved problematic in the SDFSCA program’s ability to promote safe, drug-free schools; some constrain programmatic change. The chapter concludes with a brief review of some recent improvements in the program.

**BUDGETARY ISSUES**

The SDFSCA program’s overall problems are reflected in its lack of growth over the past decade. In 1990, the SDFSCA program accounted for more than 5 percent of federal drug control expenditures. While the drug control budget expanded substantially over the next seven years, funding for the program actually decreased—its share of the total fell to less than 3 percent. This is particularly striking in view of bipartisan support for prevention programs and rising levels of overall federal spending on education. The SDFSCA program’s share of the total federal drug prevention budget is likewise decreasing, having fallen to 26 percent in 1999, compared to 40 percent in 1991 (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 1999).

\textsuperscript{1}An excellent assessment of the current program is given in Office of National Drug Control Policy Director Barry McCaffrey’s testimony before Congress on the Clinton administration’s proposal for changes (McCaffrey, 1999).
Because SDFSCA money is distributed at both state and federal levels primarily through enrollment- and population-based formulas, nearly all schools, rich or poor, get something. As a result, much of the funding goes to districts with modest drug and safety problems or with the means to finance their own efforts. Schools that have serious problems and very constrained budgets receive far too little. Moreover, the current allocation formula spreads the money so thinly ($8 per student and less than $10,000 for most districts per year) that program effects can be no more than modest, and local attempts to evaluate the effects are unaffordable. The programs funded by such minuscule amounts are rarely taken seriously by schools.

Federal funding for drug and violence prevention programs under the SDFSCA is not simply a replacement for other sources of revenue, e.g., state or school funding. State-level initiatives have provided limited support, despite the promulgation in 1989 of National Education Goal No. 6 (now No. 7): “By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.” Many states have legislated extensively against youth violence, especially in the past five years, but these initiatives have rarely focused on schools. The states have generally failed to provide funding for the prevention of school-based violence and drug abuse. Meanwhile, pressures on budgets and other academic performance priorities have made it difficult for either schools or districts to implement prevention activities in the absence of targeted outside support.

It is little wonder, then, that teachers in our focus groups expressed doubts about the continuity of prevention programs at their schools. Even where state allocations to school districts remain reasonably stable, funds for specific programs are regarded as uncertain. As one teacher put it, “We’re all in limbo: Are we getting it or are we not getting it? . . . People are asking can I do this next year or can’t I do this next year?” This lack of confidence that programs will be funded for the following year undermines planning efforts and program continuity, which in turn must influence program effectiveness.

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2Formula-based allotment does have the virtue of keeping administrative costs low.
VAGUENESS OF PURPOSE AND GOALS

A fundamental problem identified by focus group and conference participants is a lack of clarity as to the SDFSCA program’s goals. Beyond saying that the program should make schools safe and drug free—which is essentially an aspiration rather than a program goal—it is hard to articulate precisely what the program is intended to accomplish.

More specifically, focus group and conference participants found it difficult to see the practical connection between violence and drug abuse. They perceived problems associated with school violence as more pervasive and profound than those involving drug abuse. In their view, low-level violence (verbal abuse, bullying, intimidation, etc.) is widespread and has a serious but mostly hidden negative effect on educational endeavors. Outbreaks of horrifying lethal violence are totally disruptive, but they are rare and not clearly related to these day-to-day patterns. In contrast, illegal drugs are seen as causing problems for fewer students, and the problems are believed to occur more through transactions in or near schools than through use in schools per se. Few study participants see drugs as an important source of violence in their schools.

The federal government is unable to clarify this confusion through allocative priorities because it has no control over the allocation of funds among drug and violence prevention activities at the school-district level. Indeed, the federal government is unable even to identify how much money is going to these two activities. However, given the lack of any clear relationship between drug use and violence in schools, there may be no way that the federal (or state) government could set logically consistent priorities for dealing with both problems.

The federal government could, however, define goals more clearly. The Executive and Legislative branches have both had trouble figuring out what to do with the SDFSCA since its inception—that is, how to turn an aspiration into a program. The program is viewed at the local level as an opportunity to secure funding for a profusion of activities arguably related to drug and violence prevention but really addressing broader social and educational concerns about student behavior. Like most categorical grant programs, the SDFSCA pro-
gram is seen as an entitlement by its recipients, a perception that creates a major obstacle to change.

**LACK OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS**

Although the focus group and conference participants saw SDFSCA moneys as supporting prevention activities that are important in many schools, they acknowledged that few systematic data support this belief. The issue of evaluation is a serious one, made more difficult by the ambiguity of program goals. As noted above, the small grants do not provide school districts with enough money to perform evaluations, so little evaluation is done.

It is only fair to state here that the ED has not been idle or negligent in the area of evaluation. The SDFSCA rules for local planning and proposal development, monitoring, and reporting are elaborate. However, by legislative design, the Department has little or no specific enforcement authority beyond that vested by the General Education Provisions Act. As a consequence, its regulatory transactions concern primarily issues of routine compliance (Silvia, Thorne, and Tashjian, 1997). The ED has produced a steady stream of surveys, evaluations, and program guidance intended to clarify and strengthen school programs. However, it has had minimal resources for these activities and has so far been able to provide little evidence of effectiveness, either for policy managers in government or for educators seeking programs for their schools. Monitors at the state level have done little more than process grant applications and ensure that paperwork regulations are complied with; site visits and other forms of review and assistance are rare; and evaluation efforts are actually decreasing.

In the absence of evaluations of school efforts, information on successful models would be helpful. However, the research base on both drug and violence prevention is too limited to provide more than general guidance to schools about what works. The scarcity of demonstrably effective alternatives is one reason for the great popularity of the DARE program, which has in fact demonstrated effec-
Assessment 9
tiveness in only one of dozens of evaluations. Its continued dominance of the market is largely attributable to strong advocacy by local police and support from parents and schools (Gottfredson, 1997). Other programs involving professional and peer counseling have had similarly disappointing evaluation results. A few drug prevention programs, such as Life Skills Training (Botvin et al., 1995) and RAND’s Project ALERT (Ellickson, Bell, and McGuigan, 1993) have demonstrated efficacy but have not yet been widely adopted or proven effective in diverse settings. The 2001 report of the ED’s Expert Panel on Safe and Drug-Free Schools corroborates this pattern of results, as discussed below. There is even less clarity in the research findings on violence prevention. Few evaluations were conducted before 1995, and only a few interventions have been assessed at all (Samples and Aber, 1998). Conference participants observed that the weakness of the existing knowledge base has inhibited school superintendents and other senior education officials from strongly advocating specific drug and violence prevention activities. There are no interventions behind which they can confidently stand.

As pointed out at the project conference, what little high-quality research has been conducted has focused on curricular interventions. This is consistent with the SDFSCA’s historical emphasis on curriculum as the principal funded activity. However, many aspects of a school’s activities contribute to the extent of violence and drug abuse, and not all of these can be addressed through formal curriculum. For example, classroom climate (i.e., how a teacher deals with individual students’ difficulties or routine disputes among students) may be more important than targeted curricula or programs, but it is difficult to design a funding program that affects such “embedded” activities. As Hawkins, Farrington, and Catalano (1998, p. 210) concluded,

Unfortunately, those concerned about youth violence often do not focus on changing the opportunity and reward structures of classrooms. . . . More typically, schools add a violence prevention curriculum, peer mediation or peer counseling program that seeks to deal with aggressive and violent behavior directly. While these

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3DARE announced in February 2001 that it will undertake major programmatic changes in response to the negative evaluations.
Options for Restructuring the SDFSCA

programs show promise, they are only part of an effective strategy for violence prevention in schools.

The dearth of demonstrably successful models is not the only barrier to successful performance. For example, a study by the Research Triangle Institute reports that “student outcomes were better when prevention programs had greater stability over time, a definition that includes being in place for a long period, with continuity of staff, planning and leadership” (Silvia, Thorne, and Tashjian, 1997). Often, however, the local pattern has been one of inconsistent implementation. Teachers and counselors simply do not have enough time, support, training, or motivation to provide all the instruction or other services and activities that they plan (Silvia, Thorne, and Tashjian, 1997).

The teacher training issue is particularly important. Focus group and conference participants noted that most teachers have little or no preservice training in prevention of drug abuse or violence. Moreover, existing certification requirements and current demands for stronger preparation in academic areas make it unlikely that this situation will change anytime soon. Promoting incorporation of prevention training into teacher education is therefore one way in which the SDFSCA program could have an impact over the next decade. But any such strategy should be launched speedily, given the teacher turnover that will occur during that period. To date, this issue has received very little attention in legislative or program development.

LACK OF COORDINATION WITH OTHER PROGRAMS

Like many federal categorical programs in education as well as other areas, the SDFSCA program is “stove-piped.” That is, there has been very little coordination or collaboration with other education programs (e.g., education for disadvantaged students or programs that support after-school activities) or with related programs in other areas such as juvenile justice or substance-abuse prevention. As a consequence, SDFSCA programs—at the federal, state, and local levels—are not planned for or operated as components of any broader strategic approach to preventing drug abuse and youth violence. To an even greater extent than other educational activities, school-based drug and violence prevention programs would benefit from
being integrated with related activities in mental health, youth development, juvenile justice, and substance-abuse treatment. Yet both the conference and the literature report few instances of systematic collaboration, either among the federal agencies or among the relevant agencies and institutions at the state or local level. It is somewhat encouraging, however, that several of the program’s recent initiatives respond to this need (see below).

Equally important, the SDFSCA program has failed to link prevention activities to the educational reform movement. Schools are changing in fundamental ways that make stand-alone behavioral curricula more difficult to integrate into school programs. National educational goals have been promulgated, and standards-based reforms have been enacted in almost every state; they have also been incorporated into major federal programs such as Title I. The alignment of these standards with state and local curricula, professional development programs, and assessments is far advanced. Taken together, these initiatives have been the dominant feature of education policy for the past 15 years. Yet the SDFSCA program has remained isolated from this mainstream of school reform policymaking. Pursuit of the national goal of safe and drug-free schools has been largely unrelated to the pursuit of more prominent, substantive goals in areas such as reading and mathematics. Similarly, efforts to improve the implementation and performance of local SDFSCA programs have not been connected to broader school improvement and professional development strategies.

This lost opportunity is of considerable magnitude, both for those concerned about prevention and for those focused on school reform. It has been evident since the landmark Safe Schools Study of 1978 (Boesal, 1978) that the characteristics of schools dealing successfully with problems of safety and violence are virtually identical to those of schools successfully engaged in academic improvement. These characteristics include clear expectations of student performance, stable and fairly administered norms of behavior, consistent and cooperative patterns of teacher activity, and extensive communication and collaboration with families and the community. Yet there has been little federal or state encouragement or support for local initiatives that bring together the perspectives and resources of school reformers and prevention program developers. This lack of coordinated effort has been unfortunate for both.
Instead of synergy between such purposes, there has been competition. A basic finding of this analysis—which reflects observation, experts’ comments, and research—is that, in general, schools do not readily embrace drug and violence prevention activities, even though they nominally support the goals of such activities. The argument that students require a drug-free and safe classroom in order to learn, though eminently reasonable, has not turned out to be programmatically persuasive in the ongoing competition with other educational priorities. Focus group participants reported that the growing pressure on schools to meet standards in core academic subjects has even further reduced schools’ willingness to allocate time for activities related to drug-abuse and violence prevention.

In sum, then, the focus group participants saw the SDFSCA program as a categorical program trying awkwardly to deal with a deep, pervasive educational problem: the need to give students the strength and skill to eschew violence and drugs and succeed in school and in life. In the study participants’ view, such behavioral issues must be integrally related to academic achievement, not dealt with on the side. Interventions should be truly preventive, rather than designed to deal after the fact with the breakdown of progress and development that violence and drug abuse represent.

**RECENT PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS**

In recent years, the SDFSCA program has made important strides toward becoming more efficient and effective. It has developed new guidelines emphasizing the need for rigorous assessment, performance objectives, research-based program development, and systematic evaluation. It has helped create and implement a program, jointly sponsored by the ED, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Justice, that provides large comprehensive grants in approximately 75 districts, as well as a junior high school coordinator initiative. Both of these efforts resulted from recent evaluation findings. Finally, it has expanded its attempts to develop joint or coordinated efforts with such other ED programs as Title I and the new 21st Century Learning Centers program supporting expanded after-school activities. It is too soon to gauge the effectiveness of these recent efforts.
Another ED initiative may also prove beneficial to the SDFSCA program. As part of the move to strengthen the knowledge base available to schools, the Department has created an expert panel to identify programs that are effective in reducing drug use and violence.\textsuperscript{4} The panel has asked program developers to submit candidates of two types: (1) classic curriculum offerings, such as DARE, Life Skills Training, or Project ALERT; and (2) a broader set of “policies or practices that maintain safe, disciplined and drug-free environments for students, staff and management” (U.S. Department of Education, Expert Panel on Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools, 1999, p. 4). The panel published its first report in January 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Of 132 programs it received to evaluate, the panel classified nine as exemplary and 33 as promising. It is worth noting that the most popular program, DARE, was not rated as either exemplary or promising. Of those deemed to be exemplary, only two target violence in school, two are specific to licit substances only (alcohol and tobacco), and all but two are school-based. Although the number of exemplary programs is distressingly small, the panel’s work provides a basis for systematically upgrading prevention activities.

\textsuperscript{4}This is one of four such panels; the others focus on educational technology, gender equity, and mathematics and science education. Program developers are invited to present their products, along with outside evaluations, to the panels. Using specified criteria, the panels evaluate the programs, and those judged to be exemplary or promising will be disseminated broadly.