



School-based Probation Officers

Resources

Information and ideas related to the implementation of school Based Probation Officer programs can be found with:

American Bar Association, 740 15th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005-1022;
<http://abanet.org>

American Probation and Parole Association, PO Box 11910, Lexington, KY 40578-1910; 606-244-8203; 606-244-8001;
<http://www.appa-net.org/>

National Center for Juvenile Justice, (A Division of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges), 710 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219-3000; 412-227-6950;
www.ncjj.org

National Crime Prevention Council, 1700 K Street, NW, Second Floor, Washington, DC 20006-3817;
<http://www.ncpc.org/>;
<http://www.weprevent.org>.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice;
<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org>

The purpose of the School-Based Probation Officers program is to provide more direct and immediate supervision of students who are on probation than is typically possible, by having probation officers housed in and working directly in the schools.

What are School-Based Probation Officers?

The School-Based Probation Officers program targets students who have been in trouble with the law and who are under court supervision. It attempts to provide more intense supervision of these students in an effort to achieve improved outcomes for these students, by housing probation officers in the schools.

As with the School Resource Officer program (see fact sheet on that topic), each School-Based Probation Officer is a sworn law enforcement officer, and is expected to continue to function as a typical probation officer by conducting all of the normal duties of a probation officer in the community. In larger school systems, the officer's caseload may be made up entirely of youth within one or more schools in that system. In smaller systems, this officer may serve some youth or adults who are not in school, as well as youth in the school program site. The officer is usually assigned an office or desk within the school, and interacts freely with all of the students in school. These school probation officers vary somewhat in their responsibilities, but their primary goal is to have all of the youth on probation meet all probation goals and requirements stipulated by the court. This will also have the effect of decreasing recidivism and reducing youth crime.

Probation officers supervising youth, who might otherwise have contact with the youth they supervise only once or twice a month, are brought into the school environment. These officers have offices in the schools and attempt to provide much more continuous contact with youth on probation while they are in school. Probation officers can meet with their probationers during school hours, as well as before and after school. This may result in almost daily informal contact with probationers, as well as much more frequent formal consultations. It permits the officer to check attendance, discipline records, and other information about students on probation on a daily basis, as well as to check with teachers regarding academic progress. Therefore it also permits the probation officer to develop a more substantial personal relationship with the youth, resulting in improved communication and understanding.

The probation officer may also serve in some other limited capacities within the school such as assisting to monitor halls and lunchrooms,

speaking in classes, etc., which will permit the officer to get to know the school, students, and staff. The officer may also assist with emergency or crisis situations in school.

What Do We Know About School-Based Probation Officers?

Although school-based probation is not a thoroughly tested program, preliminary research suggests that it has a favorable impact on school attendance and day-to-day school conduct of probationers (Clouser, 1995; Griffin, 1999). Absenteeism and dropping out, as well as detentions and suspension among probationers, were all decreased where the program was in place. The close supervision that can be provided by someone on site means that the probation officer almost immediately knows of absences or discipline problems among students on probation. Some studies have also shown improved academic performance for the probationers (Clouser, 1995).

A related benefit of school-based probation may be a reduction of school crime, since the presence of a probation officer in the schools may deter others from committing a crime. School-based probation may also benefit other students by allowing probation officers to have routine contact with youth in various roles as mentors, classroom speakers, role models, and cautionary advisors.

Making It Work

Close cooperation and a desire to create this type of program would be required by the local juvenile justice system, as well as the schools involved. Contacts should be initiated with the local probation office to determine the desirability and feasibility of this approach in any particular jurisdiction. If the desire is present, issues of finding appropriate space within the school and arrangements for telephone and other supports for the school-based probation officer can typically be arranged. A clear understanding of the officer's purpose and role within the school should be established in writing, along with arrangements for logistical support.

Aside from the practical issues, concerns for confidentiality of students' records are also an issue when this type of program is established, but can be addressed through appropriate guidelines (Pennsylvania Juvenile Judge's Commission, 1996). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has provided

guidance on issues related to information-sharing with schools (Medaris, Campbell, and James, 1997) that also may be helpful. Office space may need to be arranged to permit confidentiality of the juvenile on probation. Once these issues have been addressed, it would also be important to identify a probation officer who has both the desire and skills to work effectively within a school environment. This may be one of the key factors to this program's success.

Summary

Although full-blown evaluations of the School Based Probation Officer Program have not yet occurred, the data appears very promising. Local evaluations have shown important positive outcomes for youth on probation, including positive school performance, fewer absences, and fewer instances of recidivism (Griffin, 1999). In addition, there appears to be other positive effects in the school environment of having probation officers housed in the schools, including diminished crime and safer and more orderly student conduct. Aside from arranging for the logistics and addressing confidentiality issues, identifying the right person to serve in this capacity will likely be the biggest factor in its success.

Reece L. Peterson, January, 2002

References

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About the Safe and Responsive Schools Project

The Safe and Responsive Schools Project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, is dedicated to developing prevention-based approaches to school safety, discipline reform and behavior improvement in schools.

Websites: <http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/> or <http://www.unl.edu/srs/> Or Contact:

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