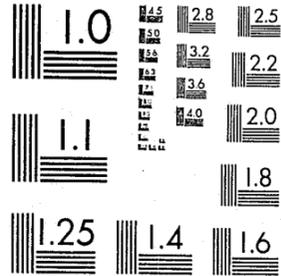


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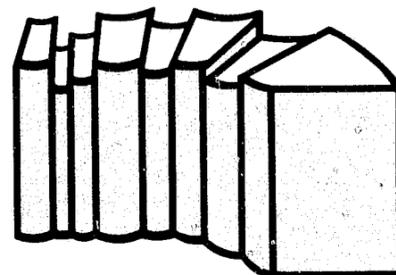
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Books in Brief

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Toward Better and Safer Schools

A School Leader's Guide to Delinquency Prevention

Introduction

Schools have a tremendous influence on young people's development and are the only formal social institution capable of addressing the full range of behaviors and conditions likely to result in juvenile delinquency. This handbook on school delinquency prevention stresses sound disciplinary practices that can keep young people from getting into trouble with the law. It describes the central roles that school boards, principals, teachers, parents, students, community members, and law enforcement agents and officials must play to create better and safer schools.

The National School Boards Association produced the handbook in cooperation with the Educational Leaders Consortium, under a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice. Part I documents the close relationship between primary delinquency prevention and effective schooling. It outlines principles to guide school-based delinquency prevention and presents a six-step process for selecting and implementing a program.

Part II captures the nuts and bolts of promising strategies by presenting a compendium of 45 successful in-school improvement and delinquency prevention models. Part III is an extended resource and reference guide to printed materials, media aids, technical assistance, and data bases. This summary focuses on the information in Part I and presents a sampling of the information in Part II of the handbook.

Rationale underlying school-based delinquency prevention

School officials still retain broad authority for establishing and enforcing disciplinary policies, although court decisions have clarified the need for procedural safeguards. School discipline remains an essential tool for delinquency prevention, but must be used with balance and sensitivity to be effective.

Research shows that school boards foster better and safer school climates when their policies stress increased communications, well-defined and fairly applied standards of behavior, and student, staff, and community

involvement. Effective school leaders must state rules clearly and enforce them fairly, build consensus among faculty and staff, involve the community, emphasize academic success, and reward achievement. They also must convince students that the school's curriculum is relevant and valuable, and disprove the belief held by alienated youths that school is a hostile, meaningless environment over which they have no control.

A six-step process for improvement planning

Choosing a focus for change. This exploratory process begins with an informal appraisal to identify areas of concern, such as needed improvements in learning and behavior, administrative style, basic skills instruction, school climate, and teacher expectations.

Assessing strengths and weaknesses. Schools can design their own assessment instruments, use ones designed by other schools or research groups, or use established group process techniques. The choice depends on the assessment's purpose, participants, and users of the data.

Some characteristics common to school improvement committees who design their own assessment instruments are that they have: access to data and to expertise capable of com-

Summarized from *Toward Better and Safer Schools: A School Leader's Guide to Delinquency Prevention* by A.G. Cuervo, J. Lees, and R. Lacey with permission of the National School Boards Association, 1984. Summary published June 1985.

Toward Better and Safer Schools is available from the National School Boards Association, 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. The price is \$14.95, plus \$2.75 for postage and handling.

piling and analyzing the information; well-defined problems amenable to solutions based directly on the results of the assessment; and a desire to consider community interests. Brainstorming, discussion groups, and surveys are useful in structuring the assessment.

Most school districts, especially small ones, need existing instruments or experts to conduct a thorough needs assessment because cutting corners in assessing needs is unwise. These instruments can be either adaptable or standardized.

Adaptable instruments have many advantages. For one, they are easily accessible. Because they have been tested and used successfully in other schools, they may save time and money. They provide some idea about expected results, can be altered to suit individual needs, and have flexible administrative requirements. However, no established norms exist for their comparison.

Standardized instruments can be comprehensive, are based on established national norms so comparisons are possible, provide a baseline for future comparison, and may save time. However, they may involve substantial purchase and interpretation costs and require careful administration. Standardized tests are not adaptable to local schools and may not be based on a norm group similar to the school using them.

Setting goals and objectives. Goals indicate where a school intends to go, while objectives indicate how it intends to get there. Objectives should be expressed in clear and concrete words. They should be realistic and achievable, and they should be measured and defined in such a way that when they have been met, success will be recognizable.

Before setting goals, the committee should consider its staff and students, its other available resources, possibilities for tapping outside expertise, and funding sources. The possibility of resistance should also be considered. Internal and external factors affecting an organization should be analyzed.

Developing an action plan and task force. A task force is a very effective way of transforming ideas into working programs. It must have the power to plan adequately and consequently should include key school and community leaders at all levels. Task force members develop an action plan by reviewing all possible strategies and then by charting specific tasks and assigning them to individuals. The task force must set deadlines and designate the time and form of reports and evaluations. The plan should enable the program to show some immediate results, but school authorities must realize that change may take 3 to 5 years at best and will entail substantial inservice training along with continuing support.

Implementing the program. A major goal of implementation is to reverse ingrained behavior in non-threatening ways. School improvement committees must consider how much the action plan can be revised without destroying its original vision, how to resolve conflicts between tried and true solutions and innovations, how to avoid the extremes of overdependence and opposition to outside expertise, and how to overcome resistance to feedback and systematic evaluation.

Programs in exemplary schools vary in their rules and expectations, but all are fair, firm, consistent, and clear to students. Effective schools emphasize regular attendance and reserve suspension for students who actively threaten students or staff. The most prevalent alternative to temporary removal of students is in-school suspension.

Successful delinquency prevention programs select top-notch staff to work with alienated youngsters. Such individuals are interested in this type of teaching, have demonstrated ability to work with problem students, relate well to a variety of students, and are interested in identifying and resolving real problems rather than responding to misbehavior symptoms.

Local schools often can implement prevention programs by reallocating existing funds or using them more efficiently. Modest amounts of money for equipment, part-time staff, or evaluation can be solicited from corporations, community organiza-

tions, or school-based groups. Any resource development strategy will be better implemented if approved by the school board and central office authority.

Several reliable strategies promote participation by parents and community residents.

- Recruiting parents, nonparents, and senior citizens as tutors and aides.
- Designating a home-school coordinator to represent the interests of parents and students in school affairs.
- Organizing a council of parents, teachers, the principal, and community members to address delinquency prevention issues.

Schools are cooperating more with law enforcement officials and are providing law-related education classes. Adopt-a-School programs and projects linking students to the world of work help to establish long-term relationships with businesses.

Gauging progress. Three common ways to gather information that supports decisionmaking are formal research, assessment, and monitoring. One type of formal research, process evaluation, documents the adequacy of program components according to specific criteria. Another approach, impact evaluation, measures outcomes of specific activities against stated goals to determine causes of the results. Assessment determines the amount of an activity, resource, or need, while monitoring compares actual events with program plans. Regardless of the evaluation's outcome, the evaluator should translate the results into terms the school community can understand.

Promising strategies

The descriptions of strategies, interventions, and programs in the handbook highlight successful improvement and delinquency prevention program models currently being implemented in public schools. The experience of the innovators of these models continues to form the cornerstone for preventing delinquency. Programs were selected on the basis of available information, transferability to other schools, evidence of

success, and implementers' willingness to share their experiences.

The handbook discusses each program or technique in terms of its purpose, rationale, target audience, program description, evidence of effectiveness, materials needed, personnel and training requirements, contacts, and references and resources. These models are presented in six categories: school organization, instructional techniques, curricula, student involvement, school-family relationships, and school-community relationships.

The following is a summarized sampling of the handbook's 45 program models that have proven successful.

School organization

- **Local School Development Project (LSDP):** The high school model, initiated in the fall of 1983, includes school-industry/business partnerships to ease the transition of students from school to work. The LSDP's goal is the improvement of students' academic achievement by establishing and supporting a planning team within the school. Teams and project staff provide teachers and administrators with many activities, including leadership training, inservice workshops on teaching techniques, and local network meetings.

- **School Team Approach (STA):** The STA uses techniques developed for alcohol and drug abuse education programs (ADAEP) mobilizing school and community people to solve school-related problems. Each school forms a 6- to 8-member team of staff, students, and community representatives who train together at an ADAEP center to develop skills in needs assessment, problem solving, and communication.

- **Schools-within-a-school:** Large secondary schools are divided into smaller units to combat alienation caused by depersonalized, sprawling high schools.

The program involves significant changes in space allocation, reassigning students and staff, rescheduling classes, and developing new communication techniques.

Instructional techniques

- **Student team learning:** Teachers organize the classroom into heterogeneous teams of four students each. Students study academic material and earn points for their teams by scoring well on quizzes or doing well in tournament competitions. Many evaluations show positive effects on learning processes, achievement, intergroup relations, self-esteem, and attitudes.

- **DISTAR (Direct Instructional System for Teaching Arithmetic and Reading):** DISTAR is a highly structured, synthetic method that aims to teach more in less time. Heavy emphasis is on structure, programmed learning, drill, and repetition. Evaluations, skills reinforcement, and rewards are built into the system. It is especially effective with slow and average learners.

- **Mastery learning:** Based on the assumption that all students can and will learn most of what they are taught, mastery learning incorporates step-by-step learning materials, initial diagnostic testing, detailed records of student progress, and individual assistance. The approach has consistently improved student learning, attitudes, and self-concepts.

Curricula

- **CLASS (Classroom Learning to Attain Social Skill):** Developed for kindergarten through third grade teachers, Project CLASS provides a perspective for evaluating the social climate within a classroom and a plan to develop better interactions among students and positive learning. Regularly scheduled activities to improve communication and cooperative skills are emphasized.

- **Law-Related Education (LRE):** Class sessions teach accurate legal information, decisionmaking skills, and the rights and responsibilities of both groups and individuals. Students may visit courts, police stations, and correctional institutions, conduct mock trials, and discuss laws related to juvenile delinquency and substance abuse. A 1981 study concluded that LRE, when taught properly, reduced student tendencies to resort to violence and enhanced their understanding of the legal system.

- **Work as a topic of study:** Designed for early adolescents, the course is divided into three progressive levels through which youth develop a vision of their future and motivation for continued learning. The program tries to develop positive attitudes in youth about their own potential and the world of work that will in turn increase socially acceptable behavior and motivation to stay in school.

Student involvement

- **Alternative pursuits program:** Groups of teenagers meet for 12- to 14-week periods in schools or community agencies either during school hours or after school. Groups have explored career development and Far Eastern philosophy, volunteered at homes for the elderly, and painted murals for schools. Evaluations show major improvements in students' self-concepts.

- **Peer culture development in Chicago and positive peer culture in Omaha:** A small group of junior and senior high school students identified as natural leaders meets daily as part of their regular school program to help one another solve problems. A group leader/staff member and a set of clearly articulated principles guide the group. Learning problem-solving processes and improving interpersonal communication skills are emphasized. Evaluations have documented positive impacts on attitudes, behavior, and grades.

- **Youth action teams:** Teams involve 8 to 10 young people aged 12 to 21 who choose a specific existing problem or current need, such as reducing school crime or developing jobs for youth. Members receive academic credit for their research and are paid on a hourly basis for actual work completed in many projects.

School-family relationships

- **Home-based reinforcement of school behavior:** Parents of elementary and junior high students furnish rewards for their child's successful school behavior. Parents and teachers plan together, agree on classroom objectives, and define desirable behavior. This system is easy to initiate,

but often difficult to maintain and may need support strategies, such as home visits, calls, or parent support groups.

- Home-school coordinators: The coordinator is a school official who acts as a liaison between school and families of students who need additional support or assistance. Programs may involve both staff and volunteers and can offer short- or long-term help. In the Columbus, Ohio, program, more than 90 percent of the parents reported coordinators were a positive influence in the home and school.
- Relationship enhancement skill training; filial enhancement skill training: This training focuses on developing better communication and conflict resolution skills in secondary students and their families. Groups may include four to five families, and training can be done in one weekend or several shorter sessions. Improving and strengthening family relationships, helping set goals, and establishing norms are emphasized.

School-community relationships

- Cooperative vocational education (CVE): Developed for students with a vocational career objective that cannot be met by existing school programs, CVE allows students to work at a career occupation during part of their school day. Pennsylvania school administrators report CVE helps minimize the dropout rate, and firms seek CVE students because they exhibit positive work attitudes.
- School-community advisory councils: This group can serve several functions—a discussion forum, source of feedback for school administrators, or a study committee established to deal with a problem. They usually include a cross-section of people with a variety of opinions. Common topics considered include building needs, school budgets, and reporting systems. Councils in several cities report improvements in the quality and climate of education.
- Youth awareness program: Designed by police and school officials

Further readings:

Reducing School Crime. By the Social Action Research Center. Sponsored by the National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. 1983: 27 pp. Availability: free microfiche from NIJ/NCJRS. NCJ 92018

Reducing School Crime—A Report on the School Team Approach. By J. Grant and F. J. Capell. Sponsored by the National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. 1983: 146 pp. Availability: free microfiche from NIJ/NCJRS. NCJ 92121

Safe School Guide. By the Connecticut Department of Education. 1980: 63 pp. Availability: free microfiche from NIJ/NCJRS. NCJ 86594

Violence in Schools. By J. Toby. Sponsored by the National Institute of Justice. 1983: 5 pp. Availability: NIJ/NCJRS, free. NCJ 92643

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in Washington, D.C., this program uses role modeling, interviews, site visits to courts and prisons, simulations, and situational analysis to help students make positive decisions when they are pressured by peers or socioeconomic circumstances. The program has produced positive attitude changes and increased knowledge, particularly among junior high school students.

Conclusion

School leaders must foster a climate that enhances learning for all students—improving school safety and discipline is fundamental to enhancing this learning climate.

The tenets of primary delinquency prevention parallel the most recent findings of school research, which state that to be effective a school requires strong instructional leadership, high expectations for achievement for all students, an orderly and positive climate that supports learning, carefully developed curricula appropriate to student needs, and regular monitoring of student academic progress.

This handbook provides the process schools can follow to become safe and more effective schools, and outlines the roles that can be played by all members of the school community in the transformation.

Sources on this topic:

National Education Association
Teacher Rights Division
1201 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
202-833-4000
Provides technical and crisis assistance to affiliates; provides handbooks and other information to educators.

National Institute of Education
1200 19th Street NW
Washington, DC 20202
202-254-5370
Provides brochures and general information on the institute; supports research on education issues.

National School Boards Association
1680 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
703-838-6722
Has clearinghouse of school district policies; publishes monthly journal.

National School Safety Center
7311 Greenhaven Drive
Sacramento, CA 95831
916-427-4600
Coordinates information exchange on school crime and violence prevention; schedules conferences; maintains data base of current laws; will have 800 hotline in the future.

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