Juvenile Crime
When Schools Take a Stand

Prevention That Works

Several Strategies Effective in Reducing Crime

What leads children to crime and delinquency is a question that defies a simple answer. Consequently, preventing juvenile crime is a challenge that defies a simple solution.

The good news is several school-based crime prevention strategies have been effective in reducing crime and delinquency and several others show promise.

These strategies, as a general rule, are most effective as "high dosage" programs – comprehensive approaches that extend over several years and include several tried and true components.

Building School Capacity

Making schools more amenable to new programs is a strategy that has contributed to the success of several of the most effective crime prevention programs.

Enhancing a school's capacity to develop, implement, and manage programs is usually done by changing the decision-making process and authority structure in ways that allow anyone from administrators and teachers to parents and students to participate in shaping and running programs.

One such method, Program Development Evaluation (PDE), has worked well. PDE stresses collaboration and ongoing evaluation.

Researchers continuously feed data back to the practitioners, enabling both to identify and overcome obstacles to strong program implementation. PDE was a key element in the Effective Schools Project in Baltimore, MD, in which a team of educators planned and carried out changes in instruction and discipline that led to more orderly class-rooms and significantly lower rates of delinquency among junior high students.

Behavior Norms

Programs that set norms or expecta-tions for behavior help reduce drug and alcohol use as well as delinquency.

Norm-setting and public pledges to remain drug-free are usually elements of effective drug education curricula. In one study, reductions in marijuana and alcohol use were attributed more to norm-setting education than to teaching students skills to help them resist drugs.[1]

Behavior Modification

Effective prevention programs include strategies to steer children away from delinquency by modifying their behavior through behavioral goals, re-warding desired behavior, and punishing undesired behavior.

One effective program included a system of rewarding good attendance and behavior with points that could be used for a class trip. Program students had better grades and attendance and fewer behavior problems than those who did not receive the treatment. They

Characteristics of Effective Programs

Strategies found to reduce crime and delinquency in at least two studies:

- Programs that build school capacity to initiate and sustain innovation.

- Programs that set and clarify norms about behaviors.

- Comprehensive instructional programs that focus on social competency skills and are continued over a long period.

- Anti-drug programs that use behavior modification and teach thinking skills to high-risk youths.

Less well-studied strategies that appear promising:

- Programs that group high-risk youths in small "schools-within-schools."

- Anti-drug programs that include efforts to improve classroom management.

were also 66% less likely to have a juve-nile record five years later.[2]

Promising Approaches

Managing classrooms to better engage students in the learning process, such as

School-based crime prevention programs that work

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)

The PATHS project for elementary school-aged children used a curriculum with units on self-control, emotions, and problem-solving. The curriculum included:

- A Feeling and Relationship Unit in which emotional and inter-personal understanding were taught beginning with basic emotions, such as sad and happy, and proceeding to complex states, such as jealous and guilt.
- A component designed to develop self-control, affective awareness and communication, and problem-solving skills.
- Interpersonal cognitive problem-solving lessons that sequentially covered 11 problem-solving steps.

Significant improvement was seen in teacher ratings of external-izing behaviors, a measure of conduct problems related to delinquent behavior later in life. Students also reported lower rates of conduct problems.

See: Greenberg, M.T., Kusche, C.A., Cook, E.T., & Quamma, J.P. (1995). Promoting social competence in school-aged children: The effects of the PATHS curriculum. *Development and Psychopathology* 7:117-136.

Families and Schools Together (FAST Track)

FAST Track, being tested in four cities, includes components to promote competence in the family, child, and school and thus prevent conduct problems and school failure during the elementary school years. The program includes:

- Training for parents in family management practices.
- Home visits to reinforce skills learned in training, promote feelings of efficacy, and enhance family organization.
- Social skills coaching for children.
- Academic tutoring for children three times a week.
- Classroom instruction on social competency skills coupled with classroom management strategies for the teacher.

After one year, parents were more involved in their children's education, and children's social-cognitive skills improved. Sig-nificantly less problem behavior was seen among students.

See: Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group (1992). A develop-mental and clinical model for the prevention of conduct disorder: The FAST Track Program. *Development and Psychopathology* 4:509-527.

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cooperative learning and use of parents or others as instructors or aides, have been elements of programs that have reduced delinquency.

Reorganizing classes to create more tightly-knit units also show promise, es-pecially among high-risk students.

In the School Transitional Environment Project (STEP), incoming high students assigned to small schools within the school consisting of 65 to 100 students improved their attendance and several measures of school achievement – factors that protect students from adverse outcomes, such as delinquency.[3]

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references

This report was based on the following publications:

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