

Lesson: Protecting Our Youth In Schools

Introduction

This lesson explores how state and local government agencies can work together to *intervene* in the lives of at-risk youth to help reduce school violence. What approaches can we take to help deter, correct, and rehabilitate young people with a history of criminal activity? In this lesson you will look at one theory about youth violence offenders and a specific public policy response to this problem.

Policy Focus

Should Illinois require schools to monitor serious habitual offenders (SHOs) and share information about them, including reports of crimes committed on school grounds, with criminal justice agencies?

Policy Summary

See “Serious Habitual Offender Comprehensive Action Program” (below)

Discussion Questions

- How significant are the following potential advantages of mandatory school participation in SHOCAP program?
 - SHOs are less likely to “slip through the cracks” of the juvenile justice system unnoticed.
 - SHOs are more likely to receive more appropriate intervention, correction, and rehabilitation attention.
 - SHOs are less likely to commit additional violent crimes on school grounds.
 - The policy is very cost-effective.
 - Other advantages to this approach (please specify).
- How significant are the following potential disadvantages of mandatory school participation in the SHOCAP program?
 - A young person might become notorious among school administrators as a “serious habitual offender” and thus receive less attention from teachers and administrators.
 - Individuals who are not identified as SHOs, but who engage in school violence, might be overlooked by authorities.
 - Individuals identified as SHOs might receive harsher penalties for non-violent crimes, such as defacing of school property or under-age drinking, than a young person who has not been identified as an SHO.
 - Personal information about SHOs could be disseminated in an unauthorized manner.
 - Other disadvantages to this approach (please specify).
- If you were a member of the Illinois General Assembly, how would you balance the advantages and disadvantages of the SHOCAP program in reaching your decision about whether to make it a mandatory program statewide?

Service Projects

- Invite your State Representative or State Senator to be part of a public hearing on this proposal.
- Develop an alternative role for schools in dealing with the problem of young repeat offenders that you think will work better than the proposed policy. Write up your idea, gather signatures of supporters, and submit your plan to your senator or representative.
- Survey students and parents on the policy. Compile, analyze, and present your findings.

Serious Habitual Offender Comprehensive Action Program¹—A Pilot Program

<i>Program Type:</i>	Information sharing and case management
<i>Target Population:</i>	Serious habitual juvenile offenders
<i>Setting:</i>	Decatur, Illinois
<i>Annual Budget:</i>	\$40,000
<i>Funding:</i>	Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice; and local resources.

Program Description:

In 1992, the Illinois General Assembly amended the Juvenile Court Act to allow each county in Illinois to establish a multidisciplinary committee to identify juveniles who qualify as **serious habitual offenders** (SHOs) and to adopt an interagency agreement for sharing information that maintains Juvenile Court Act confidentiality provisions.

SHOCAP is a cooperative information-sharing and case management program that promotes coordination among law enforcement, probation, correctional, and social service agencies; prosecutors; schools; and community aftercare services. Only staff members working directly with SHOs in the agencies that share information are allowed access to SHOCAP information. One goal of the program is to enable agencies to develop more comprehensive case histories and to better match their services with the needs of juvenile serious habitual offenders. Another goal of the program is to reduce the number of offenses committed by SHOs.

Schools participate by sharing information about SHOs with other agencies and by reporting to police all crimes that occur on school grounds by an identified SHO.

SHOs are closely supervised while performing community service and restitution work. SHOs may receive intervention and social services such as individual, family and group therapy; crisis intervention; and substance abuse assessments and treatment referrals.

¹ Source: The National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) and the Decatur Police Department (1996)