
Evaluation of Pennsylvania's School-based Probation Program

by

Patricia Torbet
Ralph Ricci
Carol Brooks
Susanna Zawacki

September 2001

National Center for Juvenile Justice
710 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-3000
(412) 227-6950



Evaluation of Pennsylvania's School-based Probation Program

by

Patricia Torbet
Ralph Ricci
Carol Brooks
Susanna Zawacki

September 2001

© National Center for Juvenile Justice
710 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-3000
(412) 227-6950

This report was prepared by the National Center for Juvenile Justice, the research division of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges for the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, supported by grant number #1997/1999-J-05-9678.

Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Acknowledgements	1
Executive Summary	2
Introduction	8
Methodology	11
Satisfaction with the School-based Program	16
School-based Probation Objectives	20
Compliance with JCJC Standards	24
Perceptions of Duties and Roles of School-based Probation Officers	42
Strengths, Weaknesses, and Issues Related to the Program	47
Conclusions	54
Recommendations	58
References	62

Acknowledgements

This report is the result of a six-month effort by several individuals whose contributions deserve mention. Lead investigators, Ralph Ricci and Carol Brooks, conducted the site visits and compiled copious notes from those visits. They also developed the survey instruments along with Susanna Zawacki who analyzed and summarized the results. Patrick Griffin distilled the essence of the report for the Executive Summary and the Conclusion chapter. Keith Snyder, Jim Anderson and JCJC consultants responded to every request for advice and assistance along the way. Thanks are extended to the many school-based probation officers, chief probation officers, probation supervisors, and school personnel interviewed at the five sites, and to the many respondents who took the time to complete the survey. Finally, the support provided by Ruth Williams in this effort is appreciated.

Executive Summary

This report describes the results of a process evaluation of school-based probation in Pennsylvania, conducted at the request of the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission (JCJC) by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ). Since the first JCJC-funded pilot demonstration of school-based probation in Allentown in 1990, Pennsylvania has made the nation's most extensive investment in the school-based probation approach, which physically moves probation officers out of traditional offices and into middle, junior, and high school buildings where juvenile probationers spend the majority of their day. Advocates of school-based probation say that its benefits include not only closer, more effective and informed monitoring of delinquents, but also safer and more orderly schools and better overall communication between juvenile probation and schools. Basing probation officers in schools is also thought to hold potential for preventing delinquent behavior on the part of students who are at risk of becoming court-involved.

A previous evaluation of school-based probation in Pennsylvania documented several important benefits of the program, including closer overall supervision, better school attendance, fewer instances of serious recidivism, fewer placements and far fewer placement days, resulting in an estimated cost savings of \$6,665 for every case assigned to school-based probation (Metzger, 1997). Due to these encouraging findings and an infusion of state funding for specialized probation programs beginning in 1998, school-based probation has expanded to more than two-thirds of Pennsylvania counties. JCJC has asked NCJJ for help in documenting the efficacy of school-based probation as it currently functions, and to develop a strategy for identifying performance measures and conducting an intermediate outcome evaluation of school-based probation programs.

The current evaluation effort was aimed at determining (1) the overall satisfaction of key participants in school-based probation; (2) participants' views of the effectiveness of the program in meeting its objectives and the availability of data for measuring performance in meeting program objectives; (3) the degree of program compliance with JCJC standards; (4) the consistency of perceptions of the duties/roles of school-based probation officers; and (5) the program's overall strengths and weaknesses.

NCJJ project staff employed three primary data collection methods: a thorough review and analysis of JCJC audit reports and other relevant documentation; statewide mail surveys of school-based probation officers, chief juvenile probation officers/supervisors of school-based probation officers, and school administrators; and on-site visits to school-based probation programs currently operating in Luzerne, Berks, Centre, Erie and Allegheny Counties.

Overall Satisfaction

All three groups of survey respondents—probation officers, probation chiefs/supervisors, and school administrators—reported high levels of satisfaction with the school-based probation program overall, as well as with the impact of the program on probationers, the services the program provides, the effect the program has on the school climate, and the communication that the program facilitates between the schools and the juvenile courts. Some dissatisfaction was expressed, however. School administrators frequently complained that school-based probation officers were unable to spend enough time in their schools, being called away by other responsibilities or assigned to more than one school. Probation personnel complained that JCJC standards for school-based probation, especially the standards for the number of contacts with probationers and their families, were unrealistic if caseloads are higher than 30.

School-based Probation Objectives

Program objectives for school-based probation cover everything from reductions in recidivism to reductions in tardiness, and improvements in academic performance. Survey respondents were asked to rate the degree to which school-based probation meets these objectives for students on probation. In addition, survey respondents as well as those interviewed in connection with site visits were asked how well the program works to discourage misconduct on the part of nonprobationers or to improve the overall school climate. Probation and school personnel were also questioned during site visits regarding the availability of data upon which to measure program performance in meeting these objectives.

With respect to students on probation, key participants were in agreement viewing the program as generally effective in meeting every objective—particularly in decreasing absenteeism, suspensions, and school disciplinary referrals. Over ninety percent of the probation respondents, and 79% of the school administrators believed the program is effective in reducing recidivism among probationers. Probation officers were least likely to rate the program as effective or somewhat effective in improving probationers' academic performance.

While somewhat less empathically, the majority of survey respondents believed the program is effective or somewhat effective in improving the overall school climate. School and probation personnel interviewed during site visits tended to agree that the presence of a probation officer in the school deters misconduct and has a positive impact on the general student body.

In general, data against which to measure program performance in meeting objectives are not being collected on a consistent basis. A few individual probation officers interviewed during

the course of the site visits collect relevant data for use in determining the impact of school-based probation on the probationers they serve. But there is no statewide system requiring school-based probation officers to report similar data consistently and regularly. Site visits revealed that probation officers recognize the importance of data collection and look forward to a technology-based solution that can facilitate data collection and reporting without burdening them with paperwork.

Compliance with JCJC Standards

Mail survey responses, site visit observations, and analysis of JCJC audit reports indicated that many school-based probation programs have some difficulty complying with JCJC standards for such programs in six key areas:

1. *School as the primary work site*: Most school-based probation officers—and particularly those in rural areas—are assigned to multiple schools; they may work “primarily” in school, but not in any *one* school. School administrators generally reported that their assigned school-based probation officers spend more of their work time out of their schools than in them.

2. *Written agreement defining probation officer role*: Both school-based probation officers and school administrators were unaware of the contents of agreements that were supposed to delineate the respective responsibilities of probation officers and school staff. In particular, the lack of a clear job description that defines the roles and duties of school-based probation officers has caused problems when school administrators have expectations different from those of probation officers.

3. *Assignment of experienced officers*: While over half of the school-based probation officers responding to the survey had two or more years of experience in juvenile probation, 30% reported having no prior probation experience at all. Clearly a significant challenge facing chief probation officers is the lack of funding to attract and retain high quality staff over time, particularly in rural areas.

4. *Written supervision plan*: The site visits revealed that supervision plans are not consistently developed for individual probationers, and JCJC audits confirmed that most counties are not incorporating balanced and restorative justice principles into either their conditions of probation or their supervision plans.

5. *Contact requirements*: Although two-thirds of the school-based probation officers reported being able to meet the standard of three face-to-face contacts with probationers per week, some were not. Due to caseloads that are sometimes larger than the optimum, assignments to multiple schools, and other duties unrelated to supervision, about a third of the school-based

probation officers surveyed reported being unable to make the required contacts with adjudicated probationers. The standard requiring weekly contact with parents or guardians of probationers is even more of a challenge.

6. *Chronological record of contacts:* Site visits revealed that probation officers do not consistently maintain chronological records of all direct and indirect contacts made on behalf of probationers and often consider this requirement to be of secondary importance. In addition to the chronological record, good data with which to make comparisons or monitor probationer progress are not consistently available.

Perceptions of Duties and Roles of School-based Probation Officers

School-based probation officers may be called upon to assume a variety of duties and take on multiple roles, many of them nontraditional. Because of concerns that conflicting or unclear views of the school-based probation officers' role could hamper their effectiveness, survey respondents were asked for their perceptions about the primary role of school-based probation officers. The responses of probation officers and school personnel were then compared to determine whether there was a pattern of disagreement or confusion. No such pattern emerged. In general, it appeared that the two groups largely agree on the primary role of school-based probation officers—officer of the court. School-based probation officers and school administrators were also asked to rate the importance of various duties that could be undertaken by probation officers in the schools. Both groups tended to consider that a school-based probation officer's most important duties are to set limits and expectations for probationers and to help them to improve their school attendance and conduct. However, school administrators rated more of the duties as somewhat important or important more often than probation officers, particularly duties related to the general school population.

Strengths and Weaknesses of School-based Probation Programs

School-based probation in Pennsylvania enjoys widespread approval and acceptance among juvenile probation and school personnel. Both probation personnel and school personnel believe it allows for closer and more informed supervision of probationers and fosters communication and a positive working relationship between the courts and schools. The process evaluation clearly revealed variations in the implementation and delivery of school-based probation services across the state. This was not unanticipated given the autonomy of a county-based system. However, such autonomy does present challenges when replicating a program

statewide. To assist the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission and juvenile probation departments in improving and enhancing the school-based probation program, the process evaluation addressed certain characteristic weaknesses, some of which are related to areas in which they struggle to meet JCJC standards for such programs that were mentioned above. Others are related to the supervision of school-based probation officers and data that monitors probationers' progress.

Apart from these clear strengths and weaknesses, a number of larger questions emerged from this assessment of school-based probation. The best ways to attract and retain experienced probation officers to school-based work, and to train and orient new officers to their duties must be addressed. There is a clear need for leadership at the state level in defining what is and is not acceptable school-based probation practice, particularly with respect to such widespread practices as multiple school assignments and large caseloads—both of which tend to negate many of the supposed advantages of the school-based approach. A clear and consistently applied definition of a “contact” is needed as well. And guidance about what to do with probationers during the summer is also recommended.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The previous and current process evaluations of school-based probation in Pennsylvania demonstrate it to be a worthwhile program with many allies. It makes sense and fits squarely with the juvenile justice system's new mission of balanced and restorative justice. However, limitations exist that impede answering the definitive question of its impact. First, good data that describe the types of cases assigned to school-based probation, monitor a probationer's progress while on probation, and track long-term success after supervision has ended are not routinely compiled or analyzed, although probation officers are collecting some of this information. Second, several of the program's core components need to be strengthened, especially the written agreement that defines the roles and duties of school-based probation officers and the supervision plans that should be based on good assessments and balanced and restorative justice principles. Third, supervision of line staff must be enhanced in order to monitor compliance. Fourth, JCJC needs to address a number of larger questions in defining what is and is not acceptable school-based probation practice. These and other conditions hinder any effort to evaluate the concrete effectiveness of school-based probation programs.

Accordingly, NCJJ, in collaboration with JCJC, has developed a plan in the form of a grant application to PCCD that will address program deficiencies so that its effectiveness can be assessed. This is as it should be—evaluators and program staff working together to make good

programs better. The plan will put in place a data collection system that will support ongoing monitoring and evaluation efforts at the local level. It will also provide state-level policymakers with aggregate information upon which to judge the program as a whole beyond the initial impact evaluation.

Introduction

Pennsylvania has made the nation's most extensive investment in school-based probation to date, having spent more than \$20M in support of the program since 1990. School-based probation changes the very nature of probation by physically moving probation officers from the "fortress" of traditional central or district offices into middle, junior, and high school buildings where youth on probation spend the majority of their day. Although the shift in location is rather simple, it has significant systems implications and raises the potential for far reaching changes in the qualitative nature of probation (Metzger, 1997).

School-based probation pre-dates system reform efforts that redefined the purpose clause of the Commonwealth's Juvenile Act and the mission of its juvenile justice system, but it fits squarely with the balanced and restorative justice framework. Moreover, school-based probation responds to the assault on juvenile probation leveled by critics at the national level who have called on the profession to reconsider its goals and work habits. This challenge was mainly directed towards the passive, office-bound, out-of-touch supervision style that equated brief, monthly, planned "contacts" with supervision of probationers and valued administrative convenience over real effectiveness (Griffin, 2000). School-based probation's response is not only increased monitoring of juvenile offenders but also better communication between schools and probation. In fact, based on the perceived success of the program, school administrators believe that placing prevention specialists in elementary schools holds potential for preventing delinquent and other at-risk behaviors.

A previous evaluation established the effectiveness of school-based probation in Pennsylvania (Metzger, 1997). That study, conducted between January 1996 – June 1997, documented the positive impact on school attendance and an increase in supervision. Juvenile offenders assigned to school-based probation were significantly less likely to be charged with serious new offenses while on probation although they were more likely to be returned to court for reasons associated with closer supervision, such as probation violations. During the 18-month study period, juvenile offenders placed on school-based probation had 40% fewer placements and less than half the number of days in placement than similar offenders in the control group. The estimated cost savings from reduced placements was \$6,665 for every case assigned to school-based probation suggesting that school-based probation is a cost-effective strategy for supervising young offenders in the community. The author recommended that a prospective experimental study be conducted to confirm these preliminary findings.

In January 2001, the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission (JCJC) asked the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) to document the effectiveness of school-based probation as it currently functions. Under a grant from PCCD, NCJJ conducted a process evaluation of school-based probation during the spring and summer of 2001. This report describes the results of the process evaluation and summarizes the plan that is in place to conduct an intermediate and long-term outcome evaluation of the program.

History of school-based probation in Pennsylvania

The first demonstration of school-based probation began as a pilot in August 1990 with a grant from the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission (Clouser, 1995). Conceptualized by the Lehigh County Juvenile Probation Department in collaboration with the Allentown School District, the program was designed to address the school district's concerns over increased behavioral problems among students under court supervision. The probation department assigned two veteran officers to the district's four middle schools to monitor school attendance, academic performance, and behavior of probationers. In addition, school-based probation officers were required to take an active part in helping probationers on their caseload obtain services and programs offered by the school district and in resolving problems with the youth's educational program.

By the mid-1990s, school-based probation was adopted by more than half of the juvenile probation departments across the Commonwealth. This widespread acceptance was a result of grass-roots support for the concept and documented positive changes in school behavior and academic performance from the pilot effort. Another incentive for adopting school-based probation was targeted funding of \$3.5 million dollars in federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency and Prevention funds and Drug Control and Systems Improvement funds through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency that supported school-based probation programs in 40 counties at the end of 1995 (Clouser, 1995; Metzger, 1997). In 1996, the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission collaborated with PCCD and the Department of Education to publish a School-based Probation Manual of Guidelines. JCJC subsequently adopted standards for all specialized probation programs in 1998.¹ The standards outlined the philosophical framework for each specialized probation program.

¹ Specialized probation programs include: community-based probation, school-based probation, intensive probation, aftercare probation, drug and alcohol intensive probation and drug and alcohol intensive aftercare.

Based on the encouraging findings documented in the Metzger evaluation, specialized probation programs received additional support in fiscal year 1998-1999 when Governor Tom Ridge recommended a \$5 million grant-in-aid appropriation to the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission for these services. In FY 1999-2000, that amount increased 100% to \$10 million followed by an additional increase in FY 2000-2001 to \$13,267,000. The State budget for FY 2001-2002 includes \$15,623,000 for continued support of existing specialized probation positions with a cost of living increase and funding for 44 new positions, a more than 200% increase in State funding since 1998. Currently, JCJC funds over 400 specialized probation positions throughout the Commonwealth. In order to receive this funding, probation departments must agree to meet the standards for the appropriate specialized probation program.

Methodology

The six-month timeframe for conducting an evaluation of school-based probation was very short. Moreover, difficulty in obtaining data that profiled the characteristics of probationers on school-based probation and the absence of data that monitored their performance imposed further limitations. Consequently, project staff, in collaboration with JCJC staff, determined that the best course of action would be to conduct a process evaluation that would document the efficacy of school-based probation as it currently functions and to develop a strategy and plan for identifying performance measures and for conducting intermediate and long-term outcome evaluations of school-based probation programs.

The research questions to be answered by the process evaluation included:

- ?? How satisfied are key respondents with the school-based probation program?
- ?? How effective is school-based probation in meeting its objectives and what data are available for measuring performance in meeting program objectives?
- ?? Are school-based probation programs complying with JCJC standards?
- ?? What are the perceptions of the duties/roles of school-based probation officers and are they consistent across key respondent groups?
- ?? What are the program's overall strengths and weaknesses?

NCJJ project staff employed a multi-modal approach to data collection. This approach was viewed as the most efficacious way of examining the effectiveness of school-based probation as it allowed for the utilization of both qualitative and quantitative data collected from a range of perspectives. Researchers employed three primary data collection methods: a thorough review and analysis of JCJC audit reports and other relevant documentation of the program, a statewide survey of key respondents, and on-site visits to five counties. The evaluation entailed the completion of the following tasks:

1. Reviewed existing literature and documentation related to school-based probation including: School-based Manual of Guidelines; David J. Metzger's Final Report on School-based Probation in Pennsylvania; Robert Oliver's report on the Implementation of School-based Probation in Erie, Pennsylvania; JCJC 2000 audit reports of counties receiving JCJC funding for school-based probation; the Report from the Attorney General's Task Force on School Safety; and the Evaluation of Student Assistance Programs in Pennsylvania.

2. Identified key persons who have been directly involved in the implementation of school-based probation: school-based probation officers; chief probation officers; school-based probation supervisors; and representatives of school administration including superintendents, principals and vice-principals, guidance officers, members of school Student Assistance Planning (SAP) teams.
3. Developed three self-administered closed and open-ended questionnaires for dissemination to the key respondent groups: school-based probation officers, probation chiefs and supervisors, and school personnel throughout the Commonwealth. The surveys included items related to process, satisfaction, and perceived impact appropriate to the intended respondent. The goal was to achieve a high rate of survey completion and return within a short turnaround time.
4. Compiled a mailing list of school administrators in the 299 schools providing school-based probation services. Distributed over 850 surveys to the three respondent groups i.e., school-based probation officers, chief/supervisors, and respective school administrators.
5. Developed a protocol for on-site visits to uniformly collect objective information about program operations, subjective data relative to perceptions of program performance, detailed descriptions of the implementation of school-based probation programs in the individual counties, as well as the current status of the programs. Relevant questions were developed for court administrators, school-based probation officers, and school administrators who have day-to-day involvement in school-based probation.
6. Identified five counties for site visits. Selection was based on geographic location, county size, and audit reports that indicated a high level of compliance with JCJC standards for school-based probation. The five counties selected were: Luzerne (population 328,148) and Berks (population 336,523) in the east; Centre (population 123,786) in central Pennsylvania; and Erie (population 275,572) and Allegheny (population 1,336,449) in the western part of the State.
7. Conducted on-site visits. Following the respective protocols, NCJJ staff interviewed court and school personnel active in the implementation and operation of school-based probation. Format of site visits was either one-on-one interviews or focus groups.
8. Attended a JCJC-sponsored forum of school-based probation officers and supervisors from across Pennsylvania.
9. Analyzed data from surveys, site visits, and JCJC audit reports that document how school-based probation has been implemented across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
10. Conducted a focus group with selected JCJC staff, project staff and probation supervisors to discuss possible approaches for evaluating intermediate and long-term outcomes for school-based probation and community-based probation programs.
11. Developed a plan and submitted an application to PCCD to conduct the outcome evaluation.

At every juncture, NCJJ project staff provided JCJC staff with updates on the activities and progress of the evaluation. Input from JCJC was sought as required.

Data analyses

Profile analysis was used to identify the general pattern of school-based services among each respondent group surveyed. Descriptive statistics consisting of frequencies and percentages are displayed.

Comparative analysis was employed to examine the general patterns in the profile analysis by comparing and contrasting respondent groups including comparisons based on rural/urban designations. These comparisons consist of a discussion of similarities and differences in patterns.

Qualitative data collected during site visits and analysis of the audit reports provide insight to the quantifiable survey items. The analysis includes a discussion of each of the research questions based on the perspective of different respondents.

Survey: Description of respondent groups

In May 2001, project staff mailed surveys to three respondent groups: chief juvenile probation officers/supervisors of school-based probation officers; school-based probation officers; and school administrators. Some questions were common to the three respondent-specific surveys (e.g., questions related to the objectives of school-based probation and the respondent's satisfaction with the program). Other questions were geared to the respondent group's knowledge of and experience with the school-based probation program.

The Juvenile Court Judges' Commission (JCJC) provided the names and addresses of chief juvenile probation officers and the number of supervisors and school-based probation officers in each county receiving JCJC funding. Surveys were mailed to 90 chiefs/supervisors and 162 probation officers in 45 counties. JCJC also provided the names of the 299 schools having a JCJC-funded school-based probation program. Project staff obtained names and addresses of school principals from the Department of Education. Principals were asked to copy the survey and distribute it to school personnel most closely involved with the school-based probation program.

School-based Probation Officers. A total of 153 school-based probation officers responded to the survey, representing all of the 45 counties receiving JCJC funding for school-based probation services. Sixty-one percent of the school-based probation officers work in

urban/suburban counties and 39% in rural counties. A total of 80% of the school-based probation officers have Bachelor's degrees, and 18% have Master's degrees. The respondents have an average of 4.2 years of probation experience prior to their assignment to school-based probation.

The majority of the school-based probation officers (59%) indicated that they are assigned to more than one school, ranging from 2 to 11 schools (average 3.3 schools). Forty-one percent indicated that they are assigned to one school. School-based probation officers from rural counties are assigned to a higher number of schools (3.8 schools) than those from urban/suburban counties (2.9 schools). Appendix A contains survey results of school-based probation officers.

Chief Juvenile Probation Officers/Supervisors. Chief juvenile probation officers/supervisors, representing 44 of the 45 counties receiving JCJC funding for school-based probation services (a 98% response rate for departments), returned a total of 81 completed surveys. In some counties, the chief has direct supervision over line staff; in the urban counties, a supervisor generally performs that function. The majority of the chiefs/supervisors (73%) indicated that the school-based probation program has been in place in their counties for five years or more, while 9% reported that school-based probation has been in place for less than two years. Half of the chiefs/supervisors work in urban/suburban counties (populations of 250,000 or more) and half in rural counties (populations of less than 250,000). The chiefs/supervisors supervise an average of 2.5 *school-based* probation officers and 4.2 *other* probation officers, for an average total of 6.7 probation officers supervised. Chiefs/supervisors spend an average of 8.7 hours a week in direct casework supervision of the school-based probation officers. Appendix B contains survey results of chief juvenile probation officers/supervisors.

School Administrators. A total of 241 surveys were returned from approximately 150 different schools for a response rate of 50%. Forty-nine percent of the respondents are from urban/suburban counties, while 46% are from rural counties. The majority of the respondents are either principals (45%) or vice principals (40%); guidance counselors make up 7% of the respondents; and 9% are "others" who have first-hand knowledge of the school-based probation program in their schools. Schools serving grades 9 – 12 make up 39% of the respondents, those serving grades 6 – 8 make up 17% of the respondents. Fifteen percent of the respondents represent grades 7-12. The remaining respondents serves schools with other grade configurations. Appendix C contains survey results of school administrators.

Site visits

Five counties were selected for site visits. These counties were selected because of their geographic location, population, and audit reports that indicated a high level of compliance with

JCJC Standards Governing School-based Probation Program Services. Project staff conducted site visits in May and June and followed a protocol for the one-on-one interviews or focus groups. Project staff attempted to interview every school-based probation officer, supervisor and chief at these sites as well as a representative from the school(s) having direct involvement with the program.

The site visits provided objective information about program operations, subjective data relative to perceptions of program performance, detailed descriptions of the implementation of the program and current status.

JCJC audit reports

In order to receive funding under the grant-in-aid program for specialized probation, departments must agree to meet JCJC Standards for the particular specialized program. JCJC consultants conduct annual audits of case records and interview probation officers assigned to any of the specialized positions and their supervisors. NCJJ project staff reviewed audit reports of every county receiving grant funding for school-based probation positions in 2000. For the purposes of this evaluation, results of the analysis of the audit reports supplement findings from the site visits and surveys.

Satisfaction with the School-based Probation Program

The process evaluation addressed the level of satisfaction school-based probation officers, chiefs/supervisors, and school personnel have with the school-based probation program. The survey asked all three respondent groups to rate their level of satisfaction (*satisfied*, *somewhat satisfied*, *somewhat dissatisfied*, and *dissatisfied*) with several aspects of the school-based probation program.

How satisfied are key respondents with the school-based probation program?

The majority of respondents indicated that they are *somewhat satisfied* or *satisfied* with the overall program, the level of communication between the court and the schools, and the program's positive impact on probationers as well as on the overall school climate. See Table 1. In fact, more than half of the respondents gave these items the highest rating (i.e., *satisfied*).

Chiefs/supervisors (100%) and school personnel (91%) reported satisfaction with the services provided by school-based probation officers. Ninety-three percent of school-based probation officers indicated that they are *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied* with their jobs. None of the probation officers reported dissatisfaction with their job or with the program overall.

What do respondents like most about the school-based probation program?

The survey included an open-ended question asking what respondents like most about the school-based probation program². Answers were grouped into categories for analysis. In general, respondents like the high level of contact between probation officers and probationers on their caseloads. Increased contact allows for immediate responses to and consequences for negative behavior. Respondents also like the positive relationship that has developed between probation and the schools where they work as a team when dealing with probationers' behaviors and needs.

² See questions 16 on SBPO survey, 13 on Chiefs/Supervisors survey, and 11 on School Administrators survey.

Table 1
All three respondent groups have high levels of satisfaction with the school-based probation program.

(Percent indicating *satisfied* or *somewhat satisfied*)

	SBPO (N = 153)	Chiefs/Supervisors (N = 81)	Schools (N = 241)
Satisfaction with perceived positive impact on probationers	94%	99%	92%
Satisfaction with overall program	92	98	93
Satisfaction with level of communication between the court and schools	91	95	86
Satisfaction with perceived positive impact on overall school climate	84	89	86
Satisfaction with services provided by school-based probation	–	100	91
Satisfaction with your job as school-based probation officer	93	–	–

Table compiled from questions 15 on SBPO survey, 12 on Chief/Supervisors survey, and 10 on School Administrators survey.

School-based Probation Officers. School-based probation officers responded most frequently that they like the direct contact they have with youth on their caseload, which allows for a more positive relationship and greater rapport with probationers as well as the ability to be more aware of what is going on in their daily lives (school, home, peer problems). Being in the school setting allows school-based probation officers to observe their probationers’ behavior and social interactions where youth spend most of their day. Being there also provides probation officers with a heads-up on suspected gang activity, rave parties and other potentially troubling situations. They can advise probationers about the consequences of participation. The program also enables probation officers to immediately respond to probationers’ problems and negative behaviors; consequently, they believe they are better able to hold probationers accountable for their behavior. Other aspects of the program that school-based probation officers like include the interaction and teamwork with school staff, the positive impact on probationers’ school attendance and behavior, and the improved contact and communication with probationers’ parents/guardians.

Chiefs/Supervisors. Chiefs/supervisors most frequently responded that they like the direct contact school-based probation officers are able to have with probationers. Chiefs/supervisors believe that having probation officers stationed in the school allows for easy accessibility and more effective supervision of probationers. The school-based probation

officers' presence and visibility in the schools allow them to respond immediately to problems probationers may experience during the school day. Both chiefs and probation officers acknowledged that an unanticipated outcome of increased contact is an increase in probation violations. While unanticipated, it is not necessarily a bad outcome if equated with more stringent offender accountability. The program also facilitates better communication and teamwork between the court/probation department and the schools. Some chiefs/supervisors also mentioned that they like the improvement in probationers' school performance and behavior, and that the program keeps probationers out of trouble while in school.

School Administrators. School administrators most frequently mentioned they like the positive relationship that has developed between the court/school-based probation officers. They also like the presence and visibility of the school-based probation officer in the school. As a representative of the court, the school-based probation officer is an authority figure who is able to require certain behaviors from probationers and to dole out certain consequences when the behavioral requirements are not met. One school administrator commented that while parents tend to manipulate the school system, they cannot manipulate the court. As a result, the school sees more cooperation with the school on the part of probationers and their parents.

What do respondents like least about the school-based probation program?

The survey also asked respondents what they like least about the program³. All three respondent groups dislike school-based probation officers being unable to spend enough time in school because of other responsibilities, such as court duties or being assigned to more than one school. Chiefs/supervisors and school-based probation officers indicated that some JCJC Standards for school-based probation programs are unrealistic, especially those stipulating a certain number of contacts, which may not always be met because of the school-based probation officers' other responsibilities. However, during site visit interviews, probation officers and chiefs/supervisors stated that the contact standards are, in fact, realistic as long as caseload size is reasonable (between 25 to 30). Probation personnel would like JCJC to define a realistic caseload size in keeping with contact requirements and the single-case management approach, which most departments seem to prefer.

School-based Probation Officers. School-based probation officers most frequently mentioned an inability to spend sufficient time in school as the aspect of the program they like least. This situation occurs because of other responsibilities inherent in a single case management

³ See questions 17 on SBPO survey, 14 on Chiefs/Supervisors survey, and 12 on School Administrators survey.

model (mainly court duties). Some school-based probation officers believe that certain JCJC standards are unrealistic. Achieving the required number of contacts is difficult to maintain because of other job responsibilities, high caseloads, and/or being assigned to more than one school. School-based probation officers reported that too much redundant paperwork is required of them, which also reduces the time they are able to spend with probationers.

Chiefs/Supervisors. Chiefs/supervisors most frequently mentioned the tendency of schools having unrealistic expectations of the school-based probation officer, seeing them as disciplinarians or “enforcers” as what they like least about the program. Chiefs/supervisors also believe that the JCJC standards are too rigid because the focus is on the quantity of contacts rather than quality. In addition, chiefs and supervisors reported that supervision of school-based probation officers is difficult because of their location in school buildings.

School Administrators. School personnel most frequently mentioned the inability of school-based probation officers to spend enough time in the school as what they like least about the program. They believe that court hearings and other court-related responsibilities and assignment to more than one school reduce school-based probation officers’ time in school. School personnel expressed a desire to have more school-based probation officers assigned to their school, such as one per school rather than one per school district.

School-based Probation Objectives

In 1996, the *Manual of Guidelines for School-based Probation Programs* outlined program objectives for both probationers and non-probationers/the general school population. One of the research questions the process evaluation addressed is respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of school-based probation in meeting program objectives. Survey questions captured perceptions of school-based probation officers, chiefs/supervisors, and school personnel about the program's effectiveness in meeting the following objectives for probationers and the general school population.

1. *Decrease school disciplinary referrals.*
2. *Decrease the frequency of detention.*
3. *Decrease the number of days in detention.*
4. *Decrease the frequency of suspensions.*
5. *Decrease the number of days of suspensions.*
6. *Decrease absenteeism.*
7. *Decrease tardiness.*
8. *Increase the number of positive school reports as evidenced by teacher quarterly comments, an increase in percentage of completed homework assignments.*
9. *Improve academic performance.*
10. *Decrease the dropout rate.*
11. *Reduce recidivism (defined as re-arrest or a "new" juvenile court referral).*
12. *Reduce the number of clients going into out-of-home placements as a result of delinquent behavior.*
13. *Improve the overall school climate.*
14. *Deter non-probation students from disruptive behaviors.*

How effective is school-based probation in meeting objectives for probationers?

Survey Results. The survey asked respondents to rate the effectiveness of school-based probation (*effective, somewhat effective, or not effective*) on each objective. School-based probation officers, chiefs/supervisors, and school personnel have very positive perceptions about the effectiveness of the program in meeting objectives related to probationers.

The overwhelming majority of respondents in each group gave every objective a rating of either *somewhat effective* or *effective*. See Table 2. Very few respondents rated the program as

not effective on any objective. However, school personnel were more likely to respond “*don’t know*” on some objectives.

Table 2
Respondents hold common perceptions about school-based probation’s effectiveness.
 (Percent indicating program is *effective* or *somewhat effective* in meeting objective)

Objective	SBPO (N = 153)	CPO (N = 81)	Schools (N = 241)
Decreasing absenteeism	98%	97%	90%
Decreasing frequency of suspension	98	93	94
Decreasing school disciplinary referral	96	97	92
Reducing recidivism	95	90	79*
Decreasing number of days of suspension	94	92	92
Reducing number of out-of-home placements	94	94	62**
Decreasing tardiness	94	95	87
Increasing number of positive school reports	94	93	89
Decreasing the dropout rate	93	85	69***
Decreasing frequency of detention	91	95	88
Decreasing number of days in detention	89	95	86
Improving academic performance	89	96	88

*Table compiled from questions 13 on SBPO survey, 10 on Chief/Supervisors survey, and 4 on School Administrators survey.
 * 15% responded “don’t know,” **34% responded “don’t know,” and ***24% responded “don’t know.”*

Site Visit Observations. Information gathered during the site visits supported the survey findings. The consensus held by both court and school personnel is that school-based probation is effective in meeting most of its objectives for probationers.

How effective is school-based probation in meeting objectives for non-probationers / general school population?

Survey Results. Respondents were asked how effective they thought school-based probation is in improving the overall climate of the school and in deterring non-probation students from disruptive behaviors. Once again, there is consensus among respondent groups. Eighty-five percent of the school administrators rated the program as *effective* or *somewhat effective* in improving school climate along with 84% of the chiefs/supervisors and 78% of the school-based probation officers. See Table 3. However, 17% of school personnel responding to the survey rated the program as *not effective* in deterring non-probation students from disruptive

behaviors. In addition, more school-based probation officers (19%) and chiefs/supervisors (16%) than school personnel (11%) responded “*don’t know*” to this objective.

Objective	SBPO (N = 153)	CPO (N = 81)	Schools (N = 241)
Improving overall school climate	78%	84%	85%
Deterring non-probation students from disruptive behaviors	75	78	71

Table compiled from questions 14 on SBPO survey, 11 on Chief/Supervisors survey, and 5 on School Administrators survey.

Site Visit Observations. While school-based probation was designed to provide an increased level of supervision over probationers while they are in school, both schools and probation hoped the program would have some ancillary benefits. The site visits confirmed survey results that the program has had a positive impact on the general school population as well. School-based probation officers and school administrators agree that the presence of an officer of the court in the school has an indirect positive impact on the overall school climate and on the general student body. School-based probation officers view the program as a proactive measure that deters non-probation students from getting involved in delinquent behavior. School administrators also see the school-based probation officer as a resource for students who are at risk. This observation is consistent with probation officer comments that students who are not on probation seek out the probation officer to discuss issues related to school, relationships, and personal matters, and to ask questions about consequences for certain behaviors. Not only is the school-based probation officer considered a resource for the general student body, but for school administrators in matters related to juvenile law and legal proceedings, and for parents of non-probationers who seek assistance in dealing with their children. School-based probation is viewed as a proactive approach to juvenile delinquency. At one middle school, the probation officer conducts a school assembly each school year to educate the entire student body and faculty about legal issues and crime. Because of the perceived success of the program, school administrators expressed a desire to place prevention specialists in elementary schools to prevent delinquent and other at-risk behaviors.

On what objectives should the school-based probation program be judged?

During the site visits, interviewers asked if the effectiveness of school-based probation should be based on measuring the program's performance in meeting the objectives listed above. They also asked if other measures should be added to that list. Many chiefs/supervisors and school-based probation officers believe that it is fair to hold probation responsible for improving school attendance and behavior, but tying the effectiveness of the program to improved academic performance (i.e., better grades) was rejected by most probation officers and a significant number of school administrators. The most commonly cited reason was related to the fact that many probationers have learning disabilities. Both groups believe that if the learning disability is behavior-based, there is a chance to affect academic performance. However, if the disability is cognitive, the program should not be held responsible for improved academic performance.

Additional measures on which to judge the program offered during the site visits include:

- ?? Qualitative measures regarding the prevention aspect of the program i.e., benefits of probation officer talking to students, sharing information, informal counseling for the general school population.
- ?? Statistics on the number of serious school incidents involving weapons, drugs, and serious assaults before and after implementation of the program.
- ?? Student satisfactions surveys.
- ?? Community service ordered and completed.

What data are available for measuring performance in meeting objectives?

A few counties collect some data necessary for measuring their performance in meeting program objectives. However, data collection is incomplete, irregular, and inconsistent across the State. A few probation officers interviewed during the site visits collect relevant data for use in determining the impact of school-based probation on the probationers they serve. There is no statewide data collection system for school-based probation officers to report similar data consistently and regularly. Site visits revealed that probation officers recognize that data collection is important in providing feedback to the funding source and for program evaluation. They look to their supervisors and JCJC to assess all data collection needs and to develop a technology-based solution that can facilitate data collection and reporting without burdening them with paperwork.

Compliance with JCJC Standards

JCJC adopted eleven standards for school-based probation programs in 1998. In essence, the standards provide the philosophical framework and guiding principles for developing and operating school-based probation programs but allow for flexibility based on the needs and norms of the local community. In order to receive JCJC grant-in-aid funding for school-based probation positions, the probation department must agree to meet these standards. One of the research questions the process evaluation answered is to what extent school-based probation programs are in compliance with the standards. The survey, site visits, and JCJC audit reports provide information relating to this question.

Do written guidelines exist for the standards?

One of the survey questions asked school-based probation officers and chiefs/supervisors whether their department maintains written guidelines for several standards. Most of the respondents indicated that their departments maintain guidelines on several of the standards for school-based probation. See Table 4. The standard least likely to be covered in a written guideline is the 10-day limit for developing the supervision plan.

Standard	SBPOs (N = 153)	Chiefs/Supervisors (N = 81)
Chronological record	90%	88%
3 contacts/week with probationers	88	84
1 parent/guardian contact/week	82	82
Daily contact with school personnel	86	79
Majority of school-based probation officer's work time spent in the school (70% except in rural areas)	88	78
Written supervision plan incorporating BARJ	85	75
Supervision plan written within 10 days of probationers' assignment to school-based probation	77	69

Table compiled from questions 7 on SBPO survey and 16 on Chief/Supervisors survey.

Are school-based probation programs in compliance with JCJC Standards?

School-based probation officers and chiefs/supervisors were asked if they are *always*, *regularly*, *sometimes*, *seldom*, or *never* in compliance with these standards. Table 5 provides percentages of respondents who indicated that they are *always* or *regularly* in compliance.

Standard	SBPOs (N = 153)	Chiefs/Supervisors (N = 81)
Chronological record	94%	90%
Daily contact with school personnel	88	84
Written supervision plan incorporating BARJ	81	70
Majority of school-based probation officer's work time spent in the school (70% except in rural areas)	78	75
Supervision plan written within 10 days of probationers' assignment to school-based probation	71	53
3 contacts/week with probationers	67	70
1 parent/guardian contact/week	50	52

The following section provides greater detail on program compliance with these and other school-based probation standards. It describes survey results, site visit observations, and analysis of JCJC audits related to each individual standard. The standard is in **bold** and any qualifying information is in *italics*.

Standard I:

School-based probation officers shall be assigned to schools from which the juvenile court receives a significant number of referrals.

School-based probation officers may be assigned to supervise juveniles in grades six through twelve.

Survey Results. The survey asked probation officers to indicate the number of probationers in each grade on their caseload. The majority of probationers assigned to school-based probation officers are in grades six through twelve. Table 6 shows the average number of probationers in each grade level. The survey also asked school personnel to indicate which grades their school serves. The overwhelming majority of school personnel indicated middle school, junior/senior high school, or senior high school.

Table 6	
On average, school-based probationers are in the ninth and tenth grades.	
Grade	Average
Under 6 th	.2
6 th	.7
7 th	1.9
8 th	2.8
9 th	5.4
10 th	4.7
11 th	3.9
12 th	2.2

Another survey question asked chiefs/supervisors whether all probationers are assigned to school-based probation if the program is in place at the school the probationer regularly attends. Seventy percent of the respondents indicated that is the case. However, certain probationers with special needs are not assigned to the school-based program including those with mental health issues or drug and alcohol problems or those charged as sex offenders, or if the probationer is on intensive probation or aftercare supervision.

Site Visit Observations / JCJC Audits Reports. The majority of schools visited in the selected counties are middle or high schools. In most cases, the school-based probation officer's caseload is limited to those grade levels; however, a few probation officers supervise probationers in lower grades, particularly if the probationer attends a "feeder school" for one currently providing the school-based probation program.

A review of JCJC audits for the year 2000 revealed that every probation department assigned school-based probation officers to schools having the most juvenile court referrals. Site visit interviews confirmed that the key factors probation departments consider in determining location of a school-based probation program include: the relationship with the school district; the number of probationers attending specific school buildings; and overall community acceptance of the concept of school-based probation. Once support for the program is

established, staffing levels are determined. In one county, implementation of the program was a natural outgrowth of the work of an existing interagency council on school and youth violence. School district personnel chaired the council and the court was an active member. The court and school district forged a united front and overcame obstacles presented by some community groups who were concerned that probation officers were being placed in the school to intensify supervision and lock up their children.

Standard II:

The primary work site for school-based probation officers shall be the school.

Recommendation – 70% of work time in the school, except in rural areas; dual case management approach is recommended.

Survey Results. Approximately 75% of chiefs/supervisors and 78% of school-based probation officers indicated that probation officers *always* or *regularly* spend 70% of their time in the school. However, 70% of school administrators said that school-based probation officers spend 50% or less of their work time in the schools.

When analyzed by county size—urban/suburban (populations of 250,000 or more) or rural (populations of less than 250,000)—a slightly higher percentage of chiefs/supervisors from rural counties indicated that this standard is *always* or *regularly* met (87% rural, 75% urban/suburban). This is also true of the school-based probation officers, but the difference in percentages is greater (91% rural, 74% urban/suburban).

School administrators from rural or urban/suburban counties have different perspectives regarding the percentage of work time school-based probation officers spend in the school. According to school administrators, school-based probation officers in urban/suburban counties spend a greater percentage of their work time in the schools than those probation officers in rural counties. School administrators in the urban/suburban counties reported that school-based probation officers spend an average of 49% of their work time in their schools, while the average is 37% in rural counties.

What could account for this discrepancy among respondent groups? School-based probation officers, particularly those in rural counties who are assigned to multiple schools, could in fact spend 70% of their work time in school, just not in one school. In fact, school-based probation officers in rural counties are more likely to be assigned to more than one school. Table 7 shows the number of schools to which probation officers are assigned. Statewide, 59% of all school-based probation officers are assigned to more than one school. According to JCJC audit reports for 2000, 29 counties (67%) assign school-based probation officers to multiple schools.

Table 7
School-based probation officers in rural counties are more likely to be assigned to multiple schools.

Number of Schools	Urban/Suburban (N = 93)	Rural (N = 60)	All SBPOs (N = 153)
One	51%	25%	41%
Two	24	30	26
Three	13	13	13
Four	7	8	7
Five or more	5	22	12
Average (multiple schools)	2.9 schools	3.8 schools	3.3

Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

To assist the school-based probation officer in meeting the 70% requirement, JCJC recommends a dual case management approach wherein “non-supervision” case responsibilities are completed by other probation officers. Although dual case management is recommended, it is rarely employed. The majority of school-based probation officers (82%) and chiefs/supervisors (77%) indicated that their county uses a single case management approach. The single-case management model is more common in urban/suburban counties than in rural counties. See Table 8.

Table 8
Single case management is the most common approach.

	Chiefs/Supervisors		SBPOs	
	Urban/Suburban N = 40	Rural N = 41	Urban/Suburban N = 93	Rural N = 60
Single Case Management	87%	66%	86%	79%
Dual Case Management	13	29	11	16
Other	0	5	3	5

Site Visit Observations / JCJC Audit Reports. Audit reports and site visits confirmed that most counties use a single case management approach. The most common reason for adopting

single case management is affordability. In 2000, audit reports from just four counties mentioned that the school-based probation program used dual case management. Only one of the five site visit counties uses a dual case management approach, which is actually a triple case management approach. Under the triple case management approach, probationers are assigned to a district or traditional probation officer at the courthouse, who has primary responsibility for case management. A school-based probation officer supervises the youth in the school environment and a community justice officer networks with victim advocates and community groups to develop and foster competency, accountability, and community protection.

Both school-based probation officers and school administrators expressed concern that court responsibilities, staff meetings, and trainings take the officer out of the school building and impede efforts to meet the 70% time-spent-in-school standard. Assignment to multiple schools also impacts the amount of time a school-based probation officer spends in any one school and reduces the level of direct supervision the probation officer has over probationers. JCJC audit reports confirm that assignment to more than one school limits compliance to this standard.

While the dual case management approach may eliminate or lessen the probation officer's presence at hearings, one county cautioned that problems might arise under a dual case-management approach. Dual (or triple) case-management requires staff to be effective communicators and to share a similar philosophy regarding juvenile offenders and probation services. If two or more probation officers deliver conflicting messages to their shared caseload of probationers, the system could be viewed as being inconsistent. The county cited problems that resulted when the district probation officer closed a case without informing the school-based probation officer or community justice officer.

Probation officers interviewed during the site visits said that a manageable caseload size (25) would allow them to meet the 70% requirement even under a single case management model. At the JCJC sponsored School-based Forum, several school-based probation officers stated that they provide more effective supervision when they have sole responsibility for supervising their caseload as compared to sharing case-management responsibilities with another probation officer.

Standard III:

A written agreement between the court and participating schools shall set forth the respective responsibilities of the school-based probation officers and school building staff.

Survey Results. The majority of chiefs/supervisors (90%) indicated that a written agreement exists between the court and the schools; 6% say it does not exist, and 4% do not know if it exists. Most of the school administrators are aware of the written agreement (59%), however 35% do not know if one exists and 5% reported that an agreement does not exist.

Site Visit Observations / JCJC Audit Reports. While the survey inquired as to the existence of a written agreement between the court and school where a school-based probation program is in place, the site visits focused on the respondent's knowledge of the content of the written agreement. As outlined in the JCJC Standards Governing School-based Probation Services, each written agreement should address the following areas:

- ?? A clear definition of the role of the school-based probation officer;
- ?? The requirement that the school provide office space that ensures confidentiality;
- ?? A plan that ensures access to the full-range of student-support services available within the school for probationers;
- ?? Probation officer participation as a member of the Student Assistance Program (SAP) team and other appropriate committees;
- ?? Provisions for regularly scheduled meetings between the school and probation administrators to discuss program issues; and
- ?? Assured access to school records of students on probation to establish baseline measures on which to evaluate program impact.

Site visits revealed that most chief probation officers/supervisors are aware of the existence of a written agreement and its contents. Few school-based probation officers or school administrators (below the level of superintendent) have direct knowledge of or have seen the agreement. Analysis of JCJC audit reports indicated that a written agreement existed and was available in all but four counties.

Clear definition of role/duties:

Although four of the five counties visited have job descriptions for school-based probation officers, some officers expressed the need to clarify their duties and roles with school

personnel. The lack of clarity has created problems in some counties. (See chapter on duties/roles of school-based probation officer.)

Office space that ensures confidentiality:

Schools provide office space for all probation officers in the counties visited. The quality of the space varies at each school ensuring different levels of confidentiality. Most school-based probation officers have a private office. In one county, three probation officers share an office (a converted classroom) with the school's Dean of Student Affairs. At most of the schools visited, office space is off main hallways in highly visible traffic areas of the school. While there may not be signage indicating the office as a probation office, school-based probation officers reported that students and school staff are aware the office is designated for the probation officer. School-based probation officers and school administrators expressed genuine concern over privacy issues and exercise discretion to ensure the confidentiality of probationers. Probation officers reported, however, that the probationers themselves are very open about their status with the court and seldom are concerned about keeping this information confidential.

Access to support services:

According to interviews conducted during the site visits, students assigned to school-based probation have full access to all student-support services. Moreover, 90% of all school-based probation officers responding to the survey rated "helping probationers obtain needed services" as an important duty.

Membership in SAP:

Probation officer involvement as a full participating member of the SAP (Student Assistance Program) team varies in the five counties. The site visits revealed that the SAP programs themselves vary from county to county and from school to school within counties. One high school, for example, contracts SAP responsibilities to a private agency and neither school faculty nor the probation officer serves regularly on the team. Under that arrangement, the probation officers are approached for input when appropriate. In another county, a probation officer reported that he serves on the SAP team for the benefit of all students, not just those on probation status. He described the task as somewhat overwhelming and one that takes valuable time away from supervising his probation caseload.

Regularly scheduled meetings:

Site visits revealed that regularly scheduled meetings are not held between school and court administration to discuss program issues. Rather, meetings are held on an as-needed basis. Neither court nor school administrators indicated this is a problem. Based upon survey results, 58% of the chiefs/supervisors and 47% of school personnel responding to the survey indicated that school and court administrators meet regularly.

Access to school records:

Site visit counties reported that access to school records of probationers is not an issue, but the timeliness of receiving the information is a concern. In some counties, the schools provide the probation officer direct access to the school's computer system. In other counties or school districts, the probation officer must direct the information request to school administration. While the request is always honored, delays in receiving the information are inevitable. One school is unable to print and distribute its daily absentee list until late morning, preventing a timely response by the school-based probation officer.

Standard IV:

Whenever possible, juvenile courts are encouraged to assign experienced juvenile probation officers to staff school-based probation programs.

Two years experience as a juvenile probation officer is recommended.

Survey Results. Over half (57%) of the school-based probation officers responding to the survey have two or more years of experience in juvenile probation. However, 30% have no experience as a probation officer and 13% have only one year of prior juvenile probation experience. See Table 9. The average number of years of probation experience is 4.2 years.

Table 9
Most school-based probation officers have two or more years of probation experience.

Years of Experience	N	Percent
0	46	30%
1	20	13
2	18	12
3 – 4	29	19
5 – 6	11	7
7 – 8	3	2
9 – 10	6	4
11 or more	20	13

Chiefs/supervisors indicated that they require between zero and three years of prior probation experience; the average is about one year (.96) of prior experience. Forty-one percent of the chiefs/supervisors do not require previous experience; 15% require 1 year; 35% require 2 years; and 1% requires 3 years. Comments from some chiefs/supervisors indicate that while they would prefer having school-based probation officers with previous probation experience, the low salary and consequent high turnover precludes being selective when filling school-based probation officer positions.

Site Visit Observations / JCJC Audit Reports. School administrators expect school-based probation officers to be knowledgeable about juvenile law, procedures, and court policies. This is the rationale behind the Standard, but departments in some counties reported that low pay and high staff turnover leave few experienced staff to fill available positions. There is quite a range of experience (from 0 to 23 years) in the site visit counties.

Two counties recognize that prior experience is important, but not as important as recruiting staff who are “people-people,” trustworthy, diplomatic, mature, and conscientious. All chief probation officers/supervisors interviewed stressed that school-based probation officers are high-profile positions; and the court’s reputation depends, in part, on the image and performance of the school-based probation officer in the school district. The educational backgrounds and experiences of school-based probation officers are diverse (e.g., criminal justice, mental health,

business, ministry). In one county, a high school principal was very positive about the probation officer's contributions to the SAP team. The probation officer has a mental health background with no previous probation experience.

JCJC audit reports reveal that compliance with this standard varies even within counties: some school-based probation officers have at least two years experience; others do not. Audit reports from two counties indicate that experienced probation staff are not interested in switching to school-based probation because the position is grant-funded and they do not want to risk losing their county employee status.

Standard V:

A written supervision plan that provides balanced attention to the protection of the community, the imposition of accountability for offenses committed, and the development of competencies shall be developed based upon information gathered from the parents/guardians, victims, school, and other relevant parties, within ten days of the placement of the child under the supervision of a school-based probation officer.

Survey Results. Eighty-one percent of the school-based probation officers and 70% of chiefs/supervisors reported that school-based probation officers *always* or *regularly* develop a written supervision plan based on balanced and restorative justice principles. In addition, 71% of school-based probation officers and 81% of school administrators consider the creation of a supervision plan to be an important part of the school-based probation officer's job.

However, the 10-day requirement for completing the plan is not always followed. Only 53% of the chiefs/supervisors indicated that probation officers *always* or *regularly* complete the plan in 10 days. A higher percentage (71%) of the school-based probation officers reported that the 10-day Standard is *always* or *regularly* met.

Site Visit Observations / JCJC Audit Reports. The site visits revealed that supervision plans are not consistently developed for individual probationers. In many cases, court intake workers complete the supervision plan before the case is assigned to school-based probation officers. In this situation, some school-based probation officers make additions to the plan, while others make no additions. Each county approaches this standard from a different perspective. Some counties use the conditions of probation stipulated by the judge as the supervision plan. Some probation officers stated that parent(s)/guardian(s) and victims are not always available for input; and it appears that no real effort is made to include them in the development of a

supervision plan. One county indicated that although they obtain input for the plan within 10 days, the plan itself is seldom in place within the 10 days recommended by the standard.

Analysis of the JCJC audit reports confirm that about one-third of the counties substitute the conditions of probation established by the court for a supervision plan. However, about 40% of the counties do develop a written supervision plan; and three additional counties used an assessment process to develop the plan. Only about one-third of the counties incorporated balanced and restorative justice principles into either conditions of probation or supervision plans.

Standard VI:

School-based probation officers shall have a minimum of three face-to-face contacts per week with each child on their caseload who has been adjudicated delinquent.

Survey Results. Sixty-seven percent of school-based probation officers indicated that they *always* or *regularly* have three face-to-face contacts a week with probationers; 7% stated that they *seldom* or *never* meet that frequently. Approximately 70% of chiefs/supervisors indicated that this standard is *always* or *regularly* met; 17% reported that it is *sometimes* met; and 4% stated that it is *seldom* or *never* met. Comments provide some possible reasons why school-based probation officers are not able to meet this standard, including:

- ?? Other duties such as, court duties, trainings, and meetings
- ?? Large caseloads
- ?? Assignment to more than one school
- ?? Assignment to schools that are some distance from one another

A few respondents mentioned that the inability to meet this standard--along with the other “contact” standards--is the primary reason for switching from school-based probation to community-based probation.

Site Visit Observations / JCJC Audit Reports. Caseload size, court hearings and other court-related duties, and multiple school assignments are critical factors in meeting this and other contact requirements. Supervising probationers in multiple schools impacts the amount of time a school-based probation officer spends in any one school and reduces the level of direct supervision the probation officer has over probationers. Another issue raised during the site visits is the *quality* of the contacts. JCJC does not specify what qualifies as a contact. Some probation officers qualify seeing a probationer in the hall and exchanging a few words as a face-to-face

contact. Other probation officers discount this casual meeting as a contact. They, on the other hand, require probationers to check in with them each morning to pick up daily sign-in sheets to be completed by the probationers' teachers. The practice of a daily sign-in sheet requiring teachers to note attendance, behavior, and class participation of the probationers is not in practice at all schools. Where it is required, in some situations it is a school policy; in others it is a probation department policy. At the School-based Probation Forum, a probation officer reported that he is assigned to a homeroom to which his probationers report. This arrangement allows him to have daily contact with his probationers.

Most probation officers interviewed during the site visits are reluctant to excuse probationers from class to meet with them. They cited two reasons: 1) the probationer misses valuable class time; and 2) the probationer is singled out which infringes on the youth's confidentiality. Another officer stated that it is difficult to maintain contacts at this level when all is going well in the case. Few probation officers are aware that JCJC allows a reduction in the number of contacts if justified and approved by their supervisor and put into writing.

One probation officer pointed out that traditional probation seldom requires more than one face-to-face contact per month. The numerous contacts made by school-based probation officers, regardless of quality, far exceed the standard for regular probation.

Analysis of JCJC audit reports revealed that compliance with this and other contact standards is difficult to determine because of a lack of good record keeping by probation officers. During audit visits, many school-based probation officers indicated that they meet the standard only when a probationer is in crisis or otherwise determined to be high risk.

Standard VII:

School-based probation officers shall have daily contact with relevant school personnel.

Survey Results. Eighty-eight percent of school-based probation officers and 84% of chiefs/supervisors reported that probation officers *always* or *regularly* have daily contact with relevant school personnel. In addition, 92% of school administrators stated that school-based probation officers have "sufficient contact" with relevant school personnel.

Site Visit Observations / JCJC Audit Reports. Site visits revealed, and JCJC audit reports confirmed, that school-based probation officers have daily contact with the school faculty who are most involved with the school-based probation program. The level of involvement varies from county to county and from school to school based on the management style of the school

administrators involved. In one county, a school principal holds monthly faculty meetings and the probation officer is expected to attend and participate. In the same school, the vice-principal holds weekly meetings to discuss any issues that require attention.

Standard VIII:

School-based probation officers shall have a minimum of one contact per week with each child's parent/guardian.

Survey Results. Only 49% of school-based probation officers and 52% of chiefs/supervisors reported that probation officers *always* or *regularly* have a minimum of one contact per week with the child's parent or guardian.

Site Visit Observations / JCJC Audit Reports. Probation officers in four of the five counties visited indicated they have no problem maintaining the weekly parental/guardian contact requirement. The preferred means of contact is by telephone. One department was cited for low compliance with this standard in previous program audits conducted by JCJC. The department is improving in this area but continues to find compliance difficult because parents/guardians are not readily available during regular school hours. In another county, school administrators credited the probation officer for getting parents/guardians of probationers involved in school-related matters – something that would not have occurred otherwise.

Because of the nature of supervision under the school-based probation program, two counties have established non-traditional work hours for their probation officers. One of the counties requires school-based probation officers to work 5% of their work hours during non-traditional hours each month. Another county requires school-based probation officers to work late one night each week to facilitate an evening meeting with parents who are typically unavailable during the day.

Analysis of JCJC audit reports revealed difficulty in confirming compliance with this standard because of inadequate record keeping. Most probation officers interviewed during the audit visits indicated that they were not in compliance with this standard, citing monthly contact as the norm. Only eight counties were in compliance with the weekly standard according to the audit reports.

Standard IX:

The caseloads of school-based probation officers should be limited to enable the aforementioned frequency of contacts.

Survey Results. Caseload sizes range from a low of 3 probationers to a high of 55, with an average of 21.7 probationers. Table 10 shows the caseload size ranges as reported by the school-based probation officers.

Caseload Range	N	Percent
1 – 10	16	11%
11 – 20	59	39
21 – 30	52	34
31 – 40	17	11
41 – 50	4	3
51 or more	1	1

School-based probation officers in urban/suburban counties reported a slightly higher average number of probationers on their caseloads (22.2) than those in rural counties (20.8). Urban/suburban caseloads range from a low of 3 probationers to a high of 55, while rural caseloads range from a low of 3 to a high of 44 probationers. [Note: Reported caseloads may be artificially low in some counties because the survey was administered at the end of the school year. A few counties reported that they attempt to close as many cases as possible by the end of school.]

A survey item asked respondents what they consider to be an optimal caseload size, given the standards for school-based probation and the case management model (single or dual) used in their counties. See Table 11.

Number of Probationers	SBPOs (N = 153)	Chiefs/Supervisors (N = 81)
25	36%	43%
20	28	24
30	9	15
Average	23.0 probationers	24.6 probationers

Site Visit Observations / JCJC Audit Reports. The size of a school-based probation officer's caseload is a critical factor in meeting the standards' contact requirements. The number of probationers attending any one school can fluctuate from month to month, and it is difficult to control this fluctuation. The general consensus of both chiefs/supervisors and school-based probation officers is that an ideal caseload is between 25 and 30 probationers. Respondents agreed that caseloads of this size would make meeting the JCJC Standards more manageable.

Analysis of JCJC audit reports conducted in spring 2000 revealed average caseloads of 11 – 30 probationers with a range of 9 to 60.

Standard X:

School-based probation officers shall promptly respond to issues pertaining to children under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court.

School-based probation officers shall not function as disciplinarians for a school.

Survey Results. Nearly 100% of both school administrators and school-based probation officers rated the duty of assisting school personnel in making decisions about probationers as *important* or *somewhat important*. In fact, it is the accessibility to probationers and an ability to hold them accountable by responding immediately to problems that school-based probation officers like most about the program. There appears to be a fine line between responding to issues and functioning as disciplinarians. Sixty-four percent of school-based probation officers believe that “augmenting the school disciplinary structure” is *somewhat important* or *important*; 13% said it is *not important* (13%) and 20% said it was *not part of their duties*. Conversely, 91% of school administrators rated that duty as *somewhat important* or *important*.

Site Visit Observations / JCJC Audit Reports. Site visits confirmed that school-based probation officers are able to respond promptly to issues pertaining to probationers. Although site visits revealed no complaints from school administrators about probation officers' timely response to probationer issues, the opposite was sometimes true. In one county, the probation officer indicated that the school does not always advise school-based probation officers in a timely manner of disciplinary problems and school actions taken involving probationers. This lack of communication makes it difficult for the probation officer to respond appropriately. In one county where there is open communication, the school-based probation officers have a policy of responding within ten minutes of an incident. In another county, the probation officer carries a two-way radio and is contacted when there is a school behavior incident. Not all of the incidents involve probationers; however, once on the scene, the probation officer feels compelled to assist, especially in cases of physical altercations. Many probation officers raised the issue of school administrators who expect probation officers to become involved in school incidents involving non-probationers. This varies from county to county and from school to school

Another issue raised during a site visit deserves mention. One school administrator prefers that school-based probation officers not take probationers into custody on school grounds. Often this administrator will "strike a deal" with the student and parents without considering action that would likely be taken by the probation officer. When the probation officer learns of the incident, and detention is appropriate, the school administrator feels undermined and thinks the school's reputation suffers because of the independent probation decision. This situation reflects a lack of good communication between the two entities, despite the location of the probation officer in the school building. It does not appear that the school administrator and probation officer are acting as a team in making decisions concerning probationers.

In general, school-based probation officers interviewed during JCJC audit visits indicated that they are able to comply with this standard on a consistent basis. However, other probation officers mentioned a need to clarify their role in relation to augmenting the school's disciplinary structure.

Standard XI:

A chronological record of all direct and indirect contacts shall, at a minimum, include: the name of the person contacted; the relationship to the child of the person contacted; the date of the contact; the time of the contact; the location of the contact; the type of contact; and a summary of the contact.

Survey Results. Ninety-four percent of school-based probation officers and 90% of chiefs/supervisors reported probation officers *always* or *regularly* maintain a chronological record

of all direct and indirect contacts. In addition, 83% of school-based probation officers and 73% of school administrators believe that maintaining a chronological record of contacts is an *important* duty of the school-based probation officers.

Site Visit Observations. Site visit interviews revealed that probation officers have difficulty maintaining a chronological record for all direct and collateral contacts made on behalf of a probationer. One reason offered for not logging all contacts is because there are so many of them! The prevailing attitude of probation officers concerning documentation of contacts is that it is not important relative to supervising probationers. Many officers noted that paperwork requirements (not just related to school-based probation) are overwhelming and interfere with their primary responsibility of supervising the probationers on their caseload.

One county documents contacts every three months unless the case is likely to return to court. At one school, the probation officer maintains no contact records. Most counties are vague as to the extent to which they document contacts. Another county has developed an electronic contact sheet. All school-based probation officers are issued laptop computers to enter the data and compile weekly reports to be forwarded to their supervisors. These laptops also provide the probation officers e-mail access to their supervisors. The evaluator observed that several probation officers are not comfortable with these new technologies and require additional training to maximize the utility of this tool.

JCJC audit reports indicate that while most school-based probation officers document their contacts with probationers and parents, the information is incomplete and inconsistent across counties.

Perceptions of Duties and Roles of School-based Probation Officers

School-based probation officers are called upon to perform a range of duties and to assume multiple roles. One of the research questions the process evaluation addressed is the perceptions of the duties and roles of school-based probation officers and the consistency of these views among respondent groups.

A written agreement between the probation department and the school establishes the parameters of the program so that all parties to the agreement have a common vision of the program. The agreement is to include a job description that clarifies the duties and roles of the probation officer. Ninety-three percent of chiefs and supervisors indicated that a job description specific to the duties of school-based probation officer exists; 92% of school-based probation officers responding to the survey indicated that they have a copy of their job description. The survey revealed that school-based probation officers have many duties and that both they and school personnel believe that most of these duties are important.

Duties of school-based probation officers

From a list of possible probation officer duties related to probationers, school-based probation officers and school administrators rated each duty as *important*, *somewhat important*, or *not important*. See Tables 12 and 13. The duties most frequently considered *important* by both probation officers and school administrators include:

- ?? Set limits and expectations (parameters) for probationers (SBPO – 96%; School – 94%)
- ?? Work to reduce probationers’ in and out-of-school suspensions, tardiness, absenteeism, and dropout rates (SBPO 94%; School 93%)

Conversely, the duties most frequently considered *not important* by both school-based probation officers and school administrators include:

- ?? Provide tutoring services for probationers (SBPO – 12%; schools – 15%)
- ?? Augment the school disciplinary structure (SBPO – 13%; schools – 5%)

An additional 24% of school-based probation officers indicated that providing tutoring services to probationers *was not part of their duties*. Likewise, school-based probation officers reported that “augmenting the school disciplinary structure” and “helping to develop alternatives to out-of-

school suspensions” are *not part of their duties*, 20% and 12% respectively. However, school administrators rated these duties as *important*, 64% and 58%, respectively.

Duties	SBPO (N=153)
Set limits and expectations (parameters) for probationers	96%
Work to reduce probationers’ in- and out-of-school suspensions, tardiness, absenteeism and dropout rates	94
Help probationers obtain services	90
Maintain a chronological record of contacts	83
Facilitate re -entry of probationers into school after placement	81

Duties	School (N=241)
Set limits and expectations for probationer	94%
Work to reduce probationers’ in and out-of-school suspensions, tardiness, absenteeism and drop-out rates	93
Facilitate re -entry of probationers into school after placement	82
Develop a supervision plan for each probationer that includes educational goals	81
Assist school personnel who are making decisions about probationers	81

School-based probation officers and school administrators were also asked to rate the importance of duties related to non-probationers and the general school population. The duties most frequently considered *important* by both respondent groups are displayed in Table 14.

Table 14
Duties related to general school population most often rated as important

Duties	SBPOs (N = 153)	School (N = 241)
Promote a positive image of the juvenile court	93%	71%
Serve as a liaison between school and court	86	81
Promote a drug-free and safe school environment	82	81
Provide a presence/visibility in conjunction with school officials to deter potential conflicts involving the general school population	71	67
At request of school, help to divert at-risk youth from formal juvenile court involvement	62	63

The duty most frequently considered *not important* by both respondent groups is providing services to students who are not under the jurisdiction of the court. Other duties frequently considered *not important* include: serve on the pupil services team; co-facilitate various support groups; make presentations in classes about the juvenile justice system; and get involved in school activities.

School-based probation officers report that several of the duties relating to the general school population are *not part of their duties*:

- ?? Serve on the pupil services team (41%)
- ?? Provide services to students who are not under the jurisdiction of the court (35%)
- ?? Co-facilitate various support groups (22%)

Perceived role of school-based probation officer

One survey item listed possible roles of a school-based probation officer and asked respondents to indicate which role they thought was the primary role of the school-based probation officer. The possible roles were child advocate, mentor, officer of the court, police officer/security, school official, and social worker. The majority (85%) of school-based probation officers responding to this question see their role as that of an officer of the court. School-based probation officers were also asked to indicate how they thought others view their primary role. Between 60 – 68% of school-based probation officers indicated that schools, probationers, and parents/guardians see them primarily as an officer of the court. However, a substantial proportion of school-based probation officers think that the school, probationers, and

to a lesser extent parents/guardians, see them as police officers / security. Table 15 shows ratings of the roles as reported by the school-based probation officers. School administrators overwhelmingly indicated (76%) that the primary role of school-based probation officers is “officer of the court.” See Table 16. It is interesting to note that only 3% of school personnel consider the primary role of school-based probation officers to be that of a police officer, while a much higher percentage of school-based probation officers (29%) think that school personnel see them in that role.

Table 15
School-based probation officers view themselves primarily as an officer of the court and believe that others see them in that role as well.

SBPO (N = 74)	School Administration (N = 77)	Probationers (N = 86)	Parents/Guardians (N = 78)
Officer of the Court (85%)	Officer of the Court (64%)	Officer of the Court (66%)	Officer of the Court (60%)
Social Worker (7%)	Police Officer / Security (29%)	Police Officer / Security (23)	Social Worker (15%)
Mentor (5%)	Mentor (3%)	Child Advocate (4%)	Police Officer / Security (13%)
Child Advocate (3%)	School Official (3%)	Mentor (4%)	Mentor (5%)
Police Officer / Security (0)	Social Worker (3%)	Social Worker (2%)	School Official (4%)
School Official (0)	Child Advocate (0)	School Official (1%)	Child Advocate (3%)

School-based probation officers were asked if differences in role perception between their personal perception and how school administrators perceive them have an impact on how effectively they perform their jobs. Most of those responding to this question indicated that the differences have little to no impact on their effectiveness (37%), while 23% say the differences have a moderate impact, and 4% say the differences have a great impact on their effectiveness as school-based probation officers. School-based probation officers believe many school administrators see them as disciplinarians who are expected to deal with any and all discipline problems involving their probationers, and sometimes involving students not on probation. Several school-based probation officers commented that their role/job as a juvenile probation officer is not clearly understood by school personnel. This leads to an uncertainty about when to involve the school-based probation officer in situations involving their probationers and what

types of situations are most appropriate to involve the school-based probation officer. (*See the comment section of the school-based probation officer survey for the complete listing of comments for this question.*)

Role	N = 147
Officer of the Court	76%
Mentor	10
Child Advocate	5
Social Worker	5
Police Officer/Security	3
School Official	2

Strengths, Weaknesses, and Issues Related to the Program

Over the past eleven years, school-based probation programs have grown and evolved in counties across Pennsylvania. The history and culture of individual probation departments help shape how school-based probation programs are implemented and how services are delivered. The process evaluation clearly revealed variations in the implementation and delivery of school-based probation services across the State. This was not unanticipated given the autonomy of a county-administered system. However, such autonomy does present challenges when replicating a program statewide. To assist the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission and juvenile probation departments across Pennsylvania in improving and enhancing the school-based probation program, the process evaluation addressed strengths, weaknesses, and issues related to the program.

Program Strengths

Overall, school-based probation officers, chiefs and supervisors, and school administrators are satisfied with school-based probation services and believe that the program is effective in meeting its objectives. The concept of having the probation officer on site at the schools where juvenile offenders spend most of their day is a practical approach to the supervision of youth on probation. School-based probation officers provide an increased level of supervision for juvenile offenders on probation. This objective addresses the accountability and community safety components of the Commonwealth's balanced and restorative justice mission. School-based probation also facilitates the third element of balanced and restorative justice – competency development – by more readily identifying the educational and mental health needs of probationers and advocating on their behalf for necessary services to meet those needs.

Communication is critical to the successful implementation of school-based probation and to the potential positive impact on juvenile probationers. School-based probation was designed to increase communication between the school district and probation department. Juvenile probation departments and schools that have entered into a partnership to deliver school-based probation services have established positive working relationships.

Schools have benefited from school-based probation because the program provides schools with alternatives for managing probationers who become behavior problems. While school-based probation is not intended to be a substitute for a school's responsibility to address in-school behavior problems, it does serve as a daily reminder to probationers that they are accountable for their behavior and that there are consequences for bad behavior. In addition, almost daily contact gives the probation officer the chance to observe a probationer's good

behavior and regular attendance and to provide the youth with positive feedback. Beyond the students who are under the supervision of the court, school administrators recognize the positive impact school-based probation has had on the general school climate. In fact, some school administrators advocate placing a prevention specialist in elementary schools as a proactive measure in reducing delinquent and other at-risk behaviors among students in grade school.

Families of probationers also benefit from the school-based probation partnership. Families are a vital support system in helping probationers successfully complete the conditions of probation. School-based probation officers attempt to keep families informed about the status and progress of their youth. Families are also afforded the opportunity to be an active participant in the juvenile justice system by providing input and support concerning their youth. Because of the regular contact with families, some families have come to recognize the genuine interest probation officers have in their youth.

Program Weaknesses

Identifying areas of weakness and addressing those limitations enhance a program's effectiveness. Because of the heterogeneity of school-based probation programs across Pennsylvania and because of the standards attached to this specialized probation program, limitations in certain areas can be expected. While most of the weaknesses identified relate to the standards, there are areas related to implementation and operations that need to be strengthened as well.

Written agreement. The written agreement is the basis for a positive working relationship between two distinct systems – the court and the school. The agreement outlines the responsibilities of the school-based probation officer and the school's commitment to make provisions for office space, access to student records, and support services for probationers, participation in the *Student Assistance Program* (SAP), and regularly scheduled meetings between the school and probation administrators to discuss program issues. The written agreement also clarifies the role of the school and the school-based probation officer and the objectives of school-based probation services. Although over 90% of chiefs/supervisors of school-based probation reported in the surveys that a written agreement "exists," approximately 35% of school administrators do not know if an agreement exists. The site visits revealed that school-based probation officers and school administrators who work closely with the officers are uncertain as to the content of the agreement.

Because of the nature of school-based probation services, school-based probation officers and school administrators acknowledge the various duties and multiple roles assumed by school-based probation officers. However, school-based probation officers expressed concern when schools expect probation officers to be involved in school supervision activities beyond supervising probationers, i.e., monitoring students in the school and patrolling outside the school. A written agreement, reviewed annually by the court and the school, would help to ensure that all parties share a common vision of the program and have clear expectations about the role and duties of the school-based probation officer.

Orientation. The written agreement is critical to the school administration's understanding of school-based probation services and both systems reaching common ground on expectations of school-based probation officers. However, information about the juvenile justice system in general and the school-based probation program in particular needs to be shared with school staff, parent groups, and students. Site visits revealed that few probation officers conduct formal orientations for all participants. Moreover, a school-based probation officer's orientation to the school system and training by the school district are generally limited to the probation officer reading the school handbook.

The site visits did identify examples of probation officers who clearly take a proactive approach by conducting regular school orientations using different formats. In one school, the school-based probation officer, together with the chief probation officer/school-based supervisor, meets with school administrators and personnel at the beginning of each school year to discuss the role and responsibilities of the probation officer(s) assigned to the school. In another school, the school-based probation officer conducts an all-school assembly to discuss disciplinary policies and procedures and the role of the probation officer in the school.

Supervision plan. Based on the survey results, the site visits, and the 2000 JCJC audit reports, most school-based probation officers are not in compliance with the standard that a written supervision plan be developed for each probationer within ten days of placement under the supervision of the school-based probation officer. A majority of counties use the court-ordered conditions of probation in lieu of developing a supervision plan. Whether this practice is in full compliance with the standard is questionable.

The supervision plan is the foundation of the juvenile offender's probation program and is essential to establishing activities and measuring outcomes of school-based probation. Supervision plans must be based on a valid and reliable assessment of the juvenile offender's

needs and risks and must address the principles of balanced and restorative justice. A comprehensive assessment helps school-based probation officers to identify appropriate steps that must be taken to achieve the goals and objectives that will be stipulated in the supervision plan. The probation officer can then measure a probationer's progress in meeting those goals and objectives. While some counties are in compliance with the standard, most fall short of developing a supervision plan that supports on-going performance monitoring.

Chronological record and data that monitor probationer's progress. Documentation of contacts with the youth, parents and others with information about the youth's progress is inconsistent and incomplete. There are discrepancies as to what constitutes a contact. Probation officers shared varying interpretations. Some probation officers documented a passing "Hi" in the hallway as a contact while others only documented formal meetings as a contact. More importantly, there is no standardized data that describe the types of cases assigned to school-based probation or that monitor a probationer's progress while under the supervision of the court. Such data would provide information that profiles probationers and describes what happens to them while they are in the program; and quantifies probation activities and progress.

Supervision of school-based probation officers. Although the site visits revealed that the chiefs and supervisors of school-based probation officers are easily accessible via e-mail, pager, or telephone, there is little indication that regularly scheduled caseload review meetings are held between the school-based probation officer and the supervisor or that a common standard for content of these meeting exists. Site visits revealed variances in the frequency of formal supervision meetings. Some have weekly supervision meetings while others meet monthly. Some school-based probation officers make judgments and decisions related to situations that arise in the school independent of the school-based supervisor although this practice may not be solely a supervision issue.

Program Issues

In addition to program weaknesses, there are several issues related to the program that require JCJC's consideration. These issues emerged in written responses on the surveys, during the site visits, at the JCJC-sponsored School-based Probation Forum, and in the 2000 JCJC audit reports.

Experienced juvenile probation officers. Many probation departments across Pennsylvania are not in compliance with the standard recommending two years of experience as a juvenile probation officer prior to assignment as a school-based probation officer. Schools expect school-based probation officers to be knowledgeable about juvenile law and court policies and procedures. Chiefs/supervisors view these positions as high profile, wherein the reputation of the probation department depends, in part, on the image and performance of school-based probation officers. The standard is a challenge for some probation departments to meet because of a small pool of experienced officers from which to draw. Moreover, in counties where school-based probation programs are funded by grant monies, experienced probation officers are reluctant to apply for the school-based positions. They are concerned about the stability of the funding and job security and do not wish to give up their county-employee status. Counties with limited human resources to satisfy the recommendation of assigning experienced probation officers to school-based positions attempt to fill the positions with individuals who have experience working with youth in fields such as education, mental health, or counseling. Overall, the site visits revealed a well educated and experienced probation staff. Nevertheless, chief probation officers expressed frustration over the lack of funding to attract and retain high-quality staff over time, particularly in rural counties.

Training of school-based probation officers. There is no formal training exclusively for school-based probation officers. The school-based probation program involves more than “transplanting” the probation officer from the district probation office to the community school. This non-traditional approach to the supervision of probationers integrates the juvenile justice system with the school system. The partnership requires the probation officer to become knowledgeable about the school system and to effectively communicate with this new “partner.” Supervising juvenile offenders in a school setting requires a different way of “doing business” than traditional probation in the district office. Supplemental training would help to facilitate this adjustment and better prepare the probation officer to be effective in the new environment.

The 2001 JCJC-sponsored School-based Forum afforded school-based probation officers the opportunity to voice their training needs. They are interested in learning what their fellow school-based officers are doing and what constitutes promising approaches or best practices. It was suggested that a “Best Practices” manual be compiled and available statewide. An area in which there is a deficiency is technology training. Some of the school-based probation officers have technology available to them but are not utilizing this tool to its full extent because they are not properly trained. Other officers are looking for basic management techniques to assist them

in the overall supervision of their cases. Several probation officers indicated a need for training to effectively work with special education students on their caseload. They believe they could be better advocates for these probationers if they had an understanding of the disability and information about the services that are available in the respective school districts.

Contact requirements/caseload/multiple school assignments. JCJC Standards VI, VII, and VIII govern school-based probation contact requirements i.e., youth, school personnel, and parent/guardian and Standard II recommends that school-based probation officers spend *at least* 70% of their time in the school environment. Although survey results revealed that chiefs/supervisors and school-based probation officers believe that the standards, especially those related to the number of contacts, are unrealistic, this view was not shared by school-based probation officers during the site visits. However, the site visits did confirm that compliance with these standards is directly related to the caseload of school-based probation officers and assignment to multiple schools. These factors impact the probation officer's ability to meet the number of required contacts with the probationers, school personnel, and families of probationers. The JCJC Standard that addresses caseload does not specify a maximum caseload; rather, it states that caseloads should be limited to enable compliance with the contact requirement. School-based probation officers are looking to JCJC to set a maximum caseload size. In counties where the probation officer considers the caseload to be manageable, the probation officer is typically able to meet the required contact and time- in-school standards.

Summer programming. Summer vacation changes the nature of school-based probation. Some probation departments have made provisions for the supervision of probationers during the summer; others conduct "traditional" probation or attempt to close cases at the end of the school year. Site visits revealed no consistent practice even within counties as to how probationers are supervised during the summer. In one county, the probation officers return to the courthouse and become regular or line probation officers; while in several other counties and school systems, the probation officer continues to work out of the school-based office but conducts visits to the home and work places of the probationers. Some counties focus summer activities on fulfilling community service or restitution requirements. One school-based probation officer involves probationers in a "Job Shadow" employment program. Based on their job interest and the availability of positions, probationers are connected to employment opportunities. In one county, school-based probation officers spend the summer developing relationships with the local police departments. The probation officers advise the police officers of changes in juvenile law and

court policy and procedure. In addition, the probation officers meet with probationers at the local police stations and brief police officers on the status of the probationers. Some school administrators would like school-based probation officers to use the summer break as an opportunity to attend training sessions and to take leave time.

JCJC recommendation to convert to community-based probation. An analysis of the JCJC audits from 2000 revealed that approximately twelve counties receiving JCJC funds to support school-based probation programs were advised to convert to community-based probation. Being assigned to multiple schools appears to be a factor in making this recommendation. However, there are counties where school-based probation officers serve multiple schools but the recommendation was not made for these counties to transition from school-based to community-based probation. JCJC should develop specific criteria for making a recommendation for counties to convert to community-based probation.

Conclusions

Satisfaction with the School-based Probation Program

School administrators, school-based probation officers, and chiefs/supervisors have high regard for the program overall and particularly its positive impact on probationers and improved communication between the school and the probation department. The program allows school-based probation officers to have increased contact with probationers. This, in turn, promotes better rapport with youth on probation and more effective supervision. The outcomes are positive relationships, faster response times, and more offender accountability.

The predominant dissatisfaction with the program is school-based probation officers not being able to spend enough time at the school, which cuts into the time spent with probationers. Court hearings, other duties unrelated to supervision, and assignment to more than one school were the most frequently cited reasons for not being able to meet the standard requiring 70% of work time to be spent at school. Confusion over the school-based probation officer's role, especially relating to discipline, is also a concern.

Effectiveness in Meeting Program Objectives

Overwhelmingly, court and school personnel believe that the program is effective at meeting its objectives. Moreover, school-based probation officers, school administrators, and chiefs hold common perceptions about the effectiveness of the program on probationers and on the general school population. With respect to students on probation, all respondent groups in agreement in viewing the program as generally effective, particularly in decreasing absenteeism, suspensions, and school disciplinary referrals.

The objective school-based probation officers were least likely to rate as effective was improving academic performance. They cited the high occurrence of special education and learning disability problems as the reason the program is not very effective in improving a probationer's grades. Some went so far as to suggest that it is unrealistic to hold the program to this objective.

Although school-based probation officers agreed that data should be collected to measure the program's performance in meeting its objectives, there is a lack of consistent, relevant data on which to judge the program.

Compliance with JCJC Standards

Responses of chief juvenile probation officers, supervisors, and school-based probation officers to the survey revealed variances in compliance with JCJC standards for school-based probation programs. Standards with which probation personnel were most likely to claim total or at least “regular” compliance included the standard requiring the keeping of chronological records of direct and indirect contacts (Standard XI) and the standard requiring daily contact with relevant school personnel (Standard VII). Standards with which probation personnel were least likely to claim total or regular compliance included the standard requiring three face-to-face contacts per week with adjudicated probationers (Standard VI) and the standard requiring weekly contact with their parents or guardians (Standard VIII). However, even where probation personnel indicated high levels of compliance with JCJC standards, their assessments sometimes differed from those of school personnel, and were not always confirmed by site visit observations and JCJC audits.

Local probation departments appear to have a record of mixed success in meeting the following critical JCJC standards:

- ?? *Primary work site*: With respect to the standard requiring that the school be the “primary work site” for school-based probation officers (Standard II), it appeared that school-based probation officers might indeed be spending the required proportion of their time in school—but not necessarily in any *one* school. While probation personnel generally reported that they are in compliance with the standard, most school-based probation officers—including three-quarters of those in rural areas—are assigned to multiple schools. As a result, school administrators generally reported that their assigned school-based probation officers spend more of their work time out of their schools than in them. In rural areas, according to school administrators’ estimates, a school-based probation officer could be found in the building only 37% of the time.
- ?? *Written agreements*. Even if school-based probation programs are in technical compliance with Standard III, which calls for written agreements between juvenile courts and participating schools, these agreements have not effectively delineated the respective responsibilities of probation officers and building staff as intended. For one thing, the site visits revealed that school-based probation officers and school administrators are uncertain as to the contents of the agreements.
- ?? *Assignment of experienced juvenile probation officers to school-based programs*. Over half of the school-based probation officers responding to the survey have two or

more years of experience in juvenile probation, as recommended by Standard IV, but 30% have no prior experience as juvenile probation officers. The average number of years of probation experience is 4.2 years.

?? *Development of a written supervision plan based on balanced and restorative justice principles within ten days of a child's entering a school-based probation program.*

The site visits revealed that supervision plans are not consistently developed for individual probationers, as called for in Standard V. JCJC audits confirm that many counties are not preparing individual plans or incorporating balanced and restorative justice principles into either their conditions of probation or their supervision plans. And only 53% of the chiefs/supervisors surveyed claimed that the 10-day requirement is always or regularly met.

?? *Contact requirements.* Two-thirds of school-based probation officers surveyed reported always or regularly meeting Standard VI, which requires three face-to-face contacts with adjudicated probationers each week. Meeting the once a week standard for parental contacts is somewhat more difficult. One-half of school-based probation officers and 52% of chiefs/supervisors reported compliance with this standard. Non-compliance was the result of large caseloads, assignment to multiple schools, and other duties not related to supervision. A few respondents cited their inability to meet these contact standards as the primary reason JCJC audits recommended switching from school-based probation to community-based probation.

?? *Chronological record of contacts.* Site visits revealed that probation officers have difficulty maintaining chronological records of all direct and indirect contacts made on behalf of probationers, as required by Standard XI. Many consider this requirement to be of secondary importance. Even among those who make an effort to document contacts, the definition of a "contact" varies considerably.

Strengths, Weaknesses and Program Issues

As noted, school-based probation in Pennsylvania enjoys widespread approval and acceptance among juvenile probation and school personnel. It allows for closer and more informed supervision of probationers, fosters communication and a positive working relationship between the courts and schools, and appears to have a positive impact on the overall school climate. However, as presently implemented, school-based probation programs have certain characteristic weaknesses, most of which are related to areas in which probation departments

struggle to meet JCJC standards for such programs. In particular, the evaluators found that whatever written agreements there may be between courts and schools participating in school-based probation, there is still doubt and confusion regarding the appropriate responsibilities of juvenile probation officers working in schools. Too many programs neglect to develop written supervision plans for probationers—rendering it next to impossible to identify the goals of supervision or measure probationer progress in achieving those goals. Failure to meet frequency-of-contact requirements is all too common, as is failure to adequately document those contacts. And there is no consistent approach to supervising school-based probation officers on the part of probation chiefs and supervisors.

Apart from these clear strengths and weaknesses, a number of larger issues and questions emerged from this assessment of school-based probation. One issue is how to attract and retain experienced probation officers—and whether it might not make sense to broaden the definition of “experienced” to include candidates with backgrounds in education, mental health, counseling, social work, and other pertinent fields. Issues of how best to train and orient school-based probation officers to their duties also remain unsettled.

Indeed, the study clearly revealed fundamental variations in the way school-based probation officers function—including how much time they are able to spend in the school building, how closely they supervise their probationers, and what nonsupervisory duties they are expected to perform. As a result, further leadership in standard-setting and enforcement is needed. In addition, the evaluation raised a number of questions. Do multiple school assignments allow for effective school-based probation practice? Is dual case management feasible in light of limited human resources? What is the minimum contact that school-based probation officers must have with their charges—and constitutes a “contact”? What is the optimal caseload size? In practice, these questions remain largely unanswered. Until they are definitively answered, it will be difficult to say with certainty what “school-based probation” is, let alone to determine how effective it can be.

Perhaps the most predominant conclusion is the need to take the program to the next level. Despite its limitations, school-based probation makes sense and fits squarely with the balanced and restorative justice framework. The program needs to be strengthened so that its effectiveness can be assessed. The recommendations chapter presents a plan for assisting JCJC and school-based probation programs in doing just that.

Recommendations

Recommendations are based on the results of the surveys of key respondent groups, on-site interviews in selected counties, analysis of JCJC audit reports of all counties having a school-based probation program in 2000, and a previous evaluation of the program.

While the previous and current process evaluations of school-based probation in Pennsylvania have demonstrated its worth, several limitations exist that impede answering the definitive question of its impact. First, good data that describe the types of cases assigned to school-based probation, monitor a client's progress while on probation, and track long-term success after supervision has ended are not routinely compiled or analyzed, although probation officers are collecting some of this information. Second, several of the program's core components need to be strengthened, especially the written agreement that defines the roles and duties of school-based probation officers and the supervision plans that should be based on good assessments and balanced and restorative justice principles. Third, supervision of line staff must be enhanced in order to monitor compliance. Fourth, JCJC needs to address a number of larger questions in defining what is and is not acceptable school-based probation practice. These conditions hinder any effort to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of school-based or other specialized probation programs.

Metzger's major recommendation from the first study of school-based probation in Pennsylvania was to prospectively collect performance data on probationers while they are in the program and to annually forward case closure forms to JCJC. Such an effort would provide information that profiles youth assigned to school-based probation and summarizes their performance at the end of their supervision period. It would describe the probationers and what happens to them while they are in the program, quantify probation activities, and track probationer progress.

It is unfortunate that Metzger's recommendations regarding data collection were not heeded in 1997. But it is not surprising. Across the nation, in both the criminal and juvenile justice systems, community corrections programs—probation, parole or aftercare, local residential centers and all other programs for managing the offender in the community—have not done a very good job at quantifying what they do, with whom, and to what benefit and are often criticized because of their inability to show that their efforts “work” (Petersilia, 1993). Still, probation is the most widely used disposition of criminal and juvenile courts, has seen more serious offenders sentenced to it over the past decade, and is increasingly called upon to provide a wider range of activities. However, unless probation programs can demonstrate to public

officials what they are getting for their dollar, these programs will be increasingly vulnerable to budget cuts. Given current budget constraints that barely allow most juvenile probation departments to retain good workers, how could they take on additional data collection responsibilities? And given the fact that probation officers are first and foremost change agents, research and evaluation are anathema to most of them. For the most part, programs are developed on good hunches, not with evaluation in mind. Practitioners need assistance from researchers who can help them articulate program goals and objectives, the activities required to meet those objectives, and the measures for monitoring performance.

NCJJ, in collaboration with JCJC, has developed a plan in the form of a grant application to PCCD to augment findings from the current process evaluation that will demonstrate the effectiveness of school-based probation. More than that, it will put in place a data collection system that will support ongoing monitoring and evaluation efforts at the local level by supervisors and school-based probation officers. It will also provide state-level policymakers with aggregate information on which to judge the program as a whole beyond the initial impact evaluation.

In some respects, this is exactly the right timing for such an effort. The school-based probation program has been in operation for more than a decade. School-based probation officers, supervisors, and chiefs know what is working with the program and what needs tinkering. Moreover, the juvenile justice system in Pennsylvania has undergone a substantial transformation over the past five years. System enhancement efforts have focused on imparting the new balanced and restorative justice vision and mission, a necessary but often overlooked first step toward developing performance measures. Pennsylvania has decided on the values and principles that will undergird its juvenile justice system and has been letting that settle into practitioner consciousness. Before a program can evaluate its performance, it must first define what it is attempting to accomplish. Balanced and restorative justice provides the framework for those discussions.

Defining a clear mission makes the next step possible: specifying program goals that fit within the larger juvenile justice system mission and the steps that must be taken to achieve those goals. School-based probation has operated before, during, and after the transition to the balanced and restorative justice model. However, several of its core components need to be strengthened; some of the standards reconsidered. To remedy this situation, JCJC convened its first annual forum of school-based probation officers and supervisors to hash out the core constructs of the program that need to be present in all locations. Are program objectives still viable? What activities should school-based probation officers be involved in to accomplish the

program's goals and objectives? Both process evaluations have documented the wide range of activities currently conducted under the program. Are these still valid? Are they reasonable?

The next step requires specifying objective (measurable) performance indicators. In this regard, the work of the Bureau of Justice Statistics/Princeton Study Group is instructive. The study group prescribed performance measures for community corrections programs and called on the profession to look beyond the long-term outcome of recidivism reduction as the only measure of program success. Instead, programs should measure the offender's activities while on probation supervision, not beyond, and should measure much more than recidivism (for example, days in school, suspensions/expulsions, behavior reports, and involvement in pro-social activities). In the next phase, evaluators and practitioners will determine performance indicators for school-based programs and tie them to specific, targeted activities that are related to balanced and restorative justice goals.

An additional, necessary component that will be addressed in the next phase includes developing supervision plans with balanced and restorative justice goals in mind, making sure the goals are translated into specific activities and matched with quantifiable performance measures. This linear approach to supervision is the linchpin for being able to monitor a juvenile's progress while on probation and to monitor a probation officer's caseload.

To accomplish the evaluation objectives, the following tasks will be conducted: A series of workshops will be held with representatives of PCCD, JCJC, Pennsylvania Association of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers, and school-based probation supervisors and line staff. The workshops will facilitate the:

- ?? development of case assessment and supervision planning procedures,
- ?? clarification of measurable intermediate outcomes,
- ?? identification of activities designed to achieve various objectives; and
- ?? specification of appropriate performance indicators for each activity.

Intermediate outcome measures will reflect both the stated mission of juvenile justice in Pennsylvania, i.e., community protection, accountability, and competency development, and the specific goals and objectives of school-based probation (e.g., enhanced partnership with schools/community, enhanced supervision, improved attendance).

Using the results from the workshop, project staff will establish a data collection strategy, data collection instruments, and a consistent protocol for collecting performance measures. It is envisioned that the strategy and protocol will address the development of supervision plans that reflect the juvenile offender's needs and activities that must be accomplished by all parties (parents, client, probation officer, school) while the youth is under supervision; interim reports

that measure progress towards successfully completing those activities; and a final case closing form that will measure the extent to which individual case plan objectives have been successfully completed. It is anticipated that interim progress reports will occur on a quarterly basis or in conjunction with school grading periods. Interim and case closing information will be captured on data entry screens developed specifically for this project in an ACCESS application.

Once the data collection system is developed, up to 10 counties will be selected for inclusion in the study. Project staff will train and provide ongoing technical assistance to school-based probation supervisors and probation officers on how to record and use the information. Case-level intermediate outcomes will be monitored closely and reported on a quarterly basis for a period of 12 months. The analysis of this data will provide information regarding: 1) the operational characteristics of effective specialized probation; 2) case characteristics; and 3) intermediate outcomes while on school-based probation and at case closing.

The evaluation of intermediate outcomes will result in the identification of the essential components of effective school-based probation. These characteristics will be used to develop a functional model of school-based probation that will specify performance standards, job qualifications, required training, specific procedures, demonstrated best practices, and expected measurable outcomes.

A second phase of the evaluation will compare graduates of school-based probation programs with graduates of other programs (regular probation) supervising similar youth (control group). This type of evaluation will provide evidence of the long-term impact of the program.

References

- Attorney General's Task Force on School Safety. (1999-2000). Report.
- Clouser, M. (1995, March). School-based juvenile probation. Pennsylvania Progress, 2 (1). Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.
- Griffin, P. (1999, Winter). Juvenile probation in the schools. NCJJ in Focus, 1 (1). Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.
- Juvenile Court Judges' Commission. (2000). Audit reports.
- Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, & Pennsylvania Department of Education. (1996, February). School-based probation: Manual of guidelines.
- Metzger, D. S. (1997). School-based probation in Pennsylvania (Final Report). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for Studies of Addiction.
- Pennsylvania Department of Education. (1999, October). Executive summary: Evaluation of student assistance programs in Pennsylvania.
- Petersilia, J. (1993, October). Measuring the performance of community corrections. Performance measures for the criminal justice system. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Justice.
- School District of the City of Erie, PA. (1995). A report on the implementation of school-based juvenile probation: 1994-95 school year. Erie, PA: Robert Oliver.

