

**Evaluating the Brookline School-Based Partnership Project:  
Reducing Substance Abuse in Brookline High School**

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# Evaluating the Brookline School-Based Partnership Project: Reducing Substance Abuse in Brookline High School

## Introduction

In 1998 the Brookline Police Department received a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS) to work in Partnership with the Brookline School Department to reduce substance abuse in Brookline High School. The specific project goal was to use the SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment) Problem Solving Model to direct students, school officials and police officers towards an increase understanding of the factors underlying substance abuse in the high school and towards developing new and unique responses to the problem. The project was a collaborative effort between the Brookline Police Department, Town of Brookline Department of Health, Brookline School District, and stakeholder groups that included parents, students, teachers and citizens.

This report provides an overall evaluation of the *School-Based Partnership Substance Abuse Prevention Grant*. The evaluation consisted of both a process evaluation (e.g., what was done and how it was accomplished) and an outcome evaluation (e.g., what was achieved and how the achievements related to the identified project goals). The following questions are answered:

- Was the project implemented and operated as planned using the SARA Problem Solving Model?
- Was the project fully utilized and was it utilized for the targeted crime problem area?
- Did the project have an impact on the targeted crime of disorder problem?

## Background<sup>1</sup>

The town of Brookline, Massachusetts with a population of 55,000 borders Boston on three sides. While the population has grown and diversified over the past 20 years, Brookline remains one of the Boston area's least transient communities.

Students in Brookline speak 37 different languages and the average annual family income is \$31,000. However, as many as 25% of its households earn less than \$25,000 per year. About 7% of Brookline's citizens live in subsidized housing, either in one of its five public housing complexes or in Section 8 funded living arrangements. Unemployment rates are low at 1.4%. While there is an affluent section of Brookline, for the most part, the sixth generation Irish and the fourth generation Eastern-European Jews live intermingled with the recently arrived Russian immigrants, the new Asian arrivals, and the second generation Latino families.

Demographically, the town is 85% Caucasian, 8% Asian, 3.5% Hispanic, 3% Black, and .5% other. Those figures shift within the school setting to 71% Caucasian, 12% Asian, 11% Black, 5% Hispanic, 1% other. These percentages shift for two main reasons. First, an increasing

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<sup>1</sup> The information for this section was taken, almost in its entirety, from Amtzis, A. and M. Minott, *Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Grant Final Report*, January 2001.

number of newer, younger residents with school-aged children are non-white. Second, Brookline public schools participate in the METCO program.<sup>2</sup>

By most standard measures, the school system and its students are doing well. There are about 6,000 students enrolled in public schools with a dropout rate of 0.1%. Additionally, there are 11 private schools serving about 2,700 students. The student-to-teacher ratio is 16:1 and test scores are in the upper competitive reaches (Brookline ranks within the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of Massachusetts towns on MCAA scores). There appears to be a general feeling that the town serves its citizens well and the town regularly examines the public services provide for all citizens.

A major example of this is how the Town of Brookline Department of Health, its School District and its Police Department (with 150 uniformed officers) worked closely with each other, citizens and other stakeholders to initiate and conduct this project on drug and alcohol use by Brookline teens.

### **The SARA Problem Solving Model**

SARA is a problem solving model police officers and researchers developed in Newport News, VA in the early to mid-1980s. The model offers a framework for approaching crime problems.<sup>3</sup> The four-step model consists of scanning, analysis, response, and assessment. SARA is used successfully by community groups and police departments in many areas of this country.

The scanning phase is basically problem identification. Its objectives are to: define a basic problem; determine the nature of that problem; determine the scope of seriousness of the problem; and establish baseline measures. Three elements are generally required to constitute a crime in the community: a victim, an offender, and a crime scene or location. Many problem solvers have found it useful in understanding a problem to visualize a link between the three elements by drawing a triangle.<sup>4</sup> An inclusive list of stakeholders for the selected problem should be identified in this phase. Stakeholders are private and public organizations and types or groups of people that will benefit if the problem is addressed or may experience negative consequences if the problem is not addressed.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> METCO is a voluntary busing system that admits inner-city urban students from lower socio-economic status neighborhoods into suburban schools.

<sup>3</sup> Eck, John E. and William Spelman, *Problem Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice and Police Executive Research Forum, 1987

<sup>4</sup> Spelman, William and John E. Eck, "Sitting Ducks, Ravenous Wolves, and Helping Hands: New Approaches to Urban Policing", *Public Affairs Comment*, Austin, Texas: School of Public Affairs, University of Texas, 1989; and Sampson, Rana, "Problem Solving", *Neighborhood-Oriented Policing in Rural Communities: A Program Planning Guide*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented-Policing Services, *Problem-Solving Tips A Guide to Reducing Crime and Disorder Through Problem-Solving Partnerships*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, April 1998.

Analysis is the heart of the problem solving process. The objectives of analysis are to: develop an understanding of the dynamics of the problem; develop an understanding of the limits of current responses; establish correlation; and develop an understanding of cause and effect. As part of the analysis phase, it is important to find out as much as possible about each element by asking Who? What? When? Where? How? Why? And Why Not? about the victim, offender, and crime scene.<sup>6</sup>

The response phase of the SARA model involves the development of strategies to address an identified crime or problem. This is accomplished by searching for strategic responses that are both broad and uninhibited. The response should follow logically from the knowledge learned during the analysis and it should be tailored to the specific problem. The goals of the response can range between totally eliminating the problem, substantially reducing the problem, reducing the amount of harm caused by the problem or improving the quality of community cohesion.<sup>7</sup>

Assessment is the phase that attempts to determine if the response strategies were successful. This information not only assists the current effort but also gathers data that builds knowledge for the future. Strategies and programs can be assessed for process, outcomes, or both. If the responses implemented are not effective, the information gathered during analysis should be reviewed. New information may be need to be collected before new solutions can be developed and tested.<sup>8</sup>

## **Implementing Problem Solving in Brookline**

### **Scanning**

The problem of student alcohol abuse was identified in the original grant application. Over the last ten years, the community of Brookline devoted extensive resources to combat the problem of teen substance abuse. Despite these efforts, youth substance abuse rates continued to rise. Data from 1997 indicate that over half of the students (52%) at Brookline High School (BHS) received substance abuse intervention or counseling. The end of the 1999 school year predicts this figure to rise by approximately 20%.

Alan Amtzis and Mary Minott in their January 2001 final report summarized the Scanning phase. In this preparatory period, town stakeholders met in a series of forums to formulate the problem outlined in the grant. During the pre-grant phase the community developed a conscious awareness about the way drug and alcohol related issues were developing in students' lives. The phase drew attention to a problem whose complexity had been understood and felt, but remained largely unexamined. Major activities during this period (the 1998-99 school year) included:

- Weekly Substance Abuse and Violence Prevention Program team meetings- At these meetings, perspectives and experiences of the health and counseling professional staff were examined to help define the problem, as they were seeing it.

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<sup>6</sup> Spelman and Eck, 1989

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 1998

<sup>8</sup> Sampson, 1994

- On-going student-based meetings, either individual or group, such as Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD), Peer Leader groups and Diversionary Program Focus groups. These groups helped incorporate student experiences into the development of the problem question.
- Increased parent and stakeholder outreach initiatives were developed in order to involve concerned adults in the collaborative process leading to the grant application.

During this period, the above groups helped identify the main grant question: “What is the concomitance of dangerous or delinquent behaviors with drug or alcohol use in teens?”

In 1999, a researcher was hired to design and implement the analysis phase of the project. The researcher, with other stakeholders, looked closely at the lives of the students, with particular attention to students who were abusing drugs and alcohol. What were their lives like? How did the traditional understandings of risk and protective factors play out in their lives? How could the school, town, and adult stakeholders better meet the students’ health and safety needs? Primary issues of concern included a range of troubling behaviors that included student attitudes, declining grades, truancy, unsupervised parties, binge drinking, unsafe sex, driving with impaired abilities, vandalism, other aggressive or impulsive behaviors, and mental health issues. Identification of these issues led directly to many of the analysis phase activities.

## Analysis

Grant activities in the analysis phase were expanded from the original grant proposal in order to allow appropriate time to understand how current services were functioning as well as to collect data from a substantial number of stakeholders. The primary step was to coordinate data from a wide variety of current sources as well as new initiatives that had been undertaken. These included:

- Superintendent of Schools Community Task Force
- Literature Review
- Parent Attitude Survey
- Student Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)
- Weekly individual counseling sessions
- In-service staff development
- Individualized interventions with students
- Parent/Guardian education evenings
- Brookline High School Teacher Survey
- Victim and Offender Interviews (using structured student interview protocols)
- Merchant and Vendor Survey
- Database on intervention resources
- School Administration records
- Police Department records
- Brookline Substance Abuse Prevention records and Diversion Program records
- Individual Counseling and Student Focus Group meetings

A detailed discussion of each of these data collection and analysis activities can be found in *Town of Brookline Substance Abuse Prevention Program Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Research Grant Project Final Report* (January 2001) by Alan Amtzis and Mary Minott. The report summarizes the analysis information into a findings format that identifies broad issues as well as risk and protective factors specific to Town of Brookline youth.

## Response

Based on initial data from the analysis activities, the Brookline Substance Abuse Prevention Program team worked in collaboration with the Brookline Police Department, Brookline High School staff, Town of Brookline Health Department and others. This group instituted a range of pilot responses and initiatives designed to work toward problem resolution. In addition, the team reached out to a variety of stakeholders. Responses were broad based and sought to provide comprehensive and intensive interventions addressing community identified personal and environmental issues. The response activities had several objectives including: reduce teen access to drugs or alcohol; raise community awareness of their role in drug use prevention; provide focused problem-solving discussion groups for teen users; and develop networking and sharing forums for professionals within the community.

Key response activities include:

- **Weekly self-help groups with students:** Various groups were organized (e.g. all male rap group, dually diagnosed research group and others) to collect personal and problem solving related information.
- **Parent support group meetings:** To help generate effective coping and remedial strategies for concerned parents.
- **Athletic department outreach:** To develop contact with “hidden” problem users within high-visibility healthy programs.
- **Updated Chemical Health Rule:** Brookline High School has chosen to narrowly tailor and stringently apply a Chemical Health Rule regarding students involved in team sports and drug or alcohol use. These rules have also been extended to include all school-based clubs, as well. Special interactive focus group evenings were sponsored for students, parents, and school staff to discuss the implication and implementation of these rules.
- **“Cops in Shops” Program:** Designed to minimize alcohol sales to underage drinkers.
- **SADD, peer leader and educator program development:** Including a credit-bearing course designed to help further appropriate role models and effective change agents within the high school population.
- **Weekly Juvenile Justice “Roundtable” Meetings:** A multidisciplinary meeting designed to provide a 3-dimensional picture of child support services around the

issues. Meeting focus has expanded from a unified approach to case management to include prevention brainstorming and policy initiatives. Participants include a wide array of school, community, police and program representatives.

- **Week-end curfew checks:** During week-ends police officers check identified youths' homes to make sure they are abiding to a court ordered or diversion program mandated curfew.
- **Student Research projects:** Students contribute their unique perspectives and information to the problem solving process.
- **Police Hotline:** Provides support to parents whose adolescent children may be at home unsupervised or to community members who alert police to unsupervised "house parties".
- **Increased in-school outreach initiatives:** The purpose is to heighten awareness about the Brookline Substance Abuse Program services for students and faculty as well to increase communication between staff, teacher, administrators, students, and others.
- **Parent's Guide:** The Brookline Substance Abuse Program team published a focused publication that provides information on frequent areas of concern for parents.
- **Brookline Housing Authority Summer Program:** In partnership with the Brookline Housing Authority, which oversees the town's five public housing projects, the Brookline Substance Abuse Program team developed a summer youth leadership program designed to hire and train high school students as community educators on various high-risk issues, including substance abuse and violence.
- **Life-skills and other curriculum based program development:** In order to provide opportunity for students to identify, access, practice and develop healthier and better informed decision making processes.
- **Alcohol and drug-free activities:** To provide opportunities and experiences that unites social events with safe environments.
- **Increased building-level security measures:** Teachers who know students well patrolling generally unsupervised campus areas.
- **Referral and treatment program research:** Designed to strengthen the Brookline Substance Abuse Program relationships with area treatment service providers in order to broaden their referral network.

- **Parent Teach Organization activities:** Staff of Brookline Substance Abuse program work with the PTO on joint activities as well as provide educational information to members.

## Assessment

These outcome measures will be thoroughly reviewed in the next section of this report – Impact of the Project.

The Brookline Substance Abuse Program utilizes an on-going approach to assessment, which includes:

- Post-Diversion Program interviews with students who have completed the Diversion Program;
- Continued review of school and police records;
- Administration of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) every three years; and
- Review of Substance Abuse Program records.

Additionally, the grant Final Report outlines several significant findings and recommendations. Nine (9) findings and recommendations are made in two key areas: Prevention Initiatives and Intervention Services.

On May 30, 2001 Mary Minott and Alan Amtzis conducted a meeting of stakeholders and interested community members to disseminate and discuss the School-Based Partnership Substance Abuse Prevention Grant Summary of Findings and Recommendations.

Approximately 40 people, including representatives from police, schools, students, parents, and other professionals, attended the meetings. Feedback was positive and the format included some interactive brainstorming and problem solving with the audience. Follow-up action planning with attendees was scheduled as a strategy to continue stakeholder and community involvement regarding student alcohol and substance abuse issues.

## Impact of the Project

The project application identified several outcome measures, both traditional and non-traditional, to evaluate the project's efforts. Three traditional outcome measures were identified:

- reduced number of incidents of target crime problem;
- reduced number of calls for service relating to target crime problem; and
- fewer police complaints.

Five non-traditional measures were identified:

- fewer/less serious injuries related to problem;
- reduced student fear;
- increased satisfaction with handling of problem;
- reduced costs associated with the problem;
- fewer disciplinary problems;

Each outcome measure will now be examined and assessed. A summary grid of the measures, as well as the information needed to assess impact, is illustrated below.

Measure	Source of Information	Crime Triangle elements	Time Period For Collecting Baseline Information	Time Period For Collecting Follow-up Information
1) Reduced # of incidents of target crime problem	Student Youth Risk Behavior Survey (SRBS)	Victim and Offender	1998-99 school year/ (Freshmen)	Sept./Oct. 2001 (seniors)
2) Reduced # of calls for service	Police Records	Victim	1998-99 school year	2000-2001 school year
3) Fewer police complaints	Police Records	Victim	1998-99 school year	2000-2001 school year
4) Fewer injuries related to problem	School Adm. Records and Prevention Program Records	Victim	1998-99 school year	2000-2001 school year
5) Reduced student fear	YRBS	Victim and Environment	1998-99 school year	Sept./Oct 2001
6) Increased satisfaction with handling of problem	Interviews	Victim	1998-99 school year	2000-2001 school year
7) Reduced cost associated with problem	School Adm. Records and Police Records	Environment	1998-99 school year	2000-2001 school year
8) Fewer suspensions or other discipline	School Adm. Records	Offender	1998-99 school year	2000-2001 school year

*Outcome Measure #1: Reduce the number of incidents of target crime problem*

**Yes, the project reduced the number of incidents of drug use**

Data from the Substance Abuse Intervention Services Program Outcome Reports indicate there were 34 school violation referrals in the 1998-99 school year and 26 school violation referrals in the 1999-2000 school year. All students who violate the Chemical Health Policy are mandated on a first offense to attend the Substance Abuse Prevention Program.

This project also worked with seventh and eighth grade students. An abbreviated Student Risk Behavior Survey was given to freshman in the 200-2001 school year. Answers were compared with those given to the Student Risk Behavior Survey by freshman in the 1998-99 school year. The numbers modestly indicate some impact on younger student behavior, especially in the area of alcohol use. 28% of freshman in the 2000-01 school year used alcohol in the last 30 days



Program. In the category of possession or use of other illicit substances, the figures indicate a modest decline in incidents and offenders.

*Outcome Measure #2: Reduce the number of calls for service*

**Yes, for marijuana calls in the school and the community; Inconclusive for alcohol calls in the community**

A minor reduction in the number of marijuana possession and use incidents at the high school (24 incidents in 1998-99 school year to 17 incidents in 2000-02 school year) correlates to a minor reduction in the number of calls for service to the police department.

Community-Level Information on Substance Abuse as reported in the District Safe and Drug-Free Reporting Form also indicated fewer police arrests in the community of age 17 or under as illustrated below<sup>11</sup>:

	98-99	99-00	00-01
Driving under the influence	2	0	0
Possession of illegal drugs	21	2	8
Sale or manufacturing of illegal drugs	5	1	0
Liquor law violations	6	1	10
Restraining orders against youth (17 or younger)	20	1	5

Excluding liquor law violations, a reduction in the number of arrests may correlate to a reduction in the number of calls for service or may reflect increased police referrals to the Substance Abuse Prevention Program.

*Outcome Measure #3: Fewer police complaints*

**Inconclusive results for fewer complaints**

As mentioned above a reduction in the number of marijuana possession and use incidents at the high may correlate to a reduced number of police complaints in this area. However, the figures may also reflect increased diversion program referrals by police in lieu of arrest, which would not translate into fewer police complaints, just fewer arrests. Substance Abuse Prevention Program records indicate a significant increase of referrals from police and probation (12 in the 1998-99 school year to 41 in the 1999-00 school year).

*Outcome Measure #4: Fewer injuries to related problem*

**Yes, there were fewer injuries related to drugs and alcohol**

According to the results from the 2000 MCAS survey question regarding students feeling “Safe” or “Very Safe” at school on an average school day, 95.7% of students in Grade 4, 94.8% of students in Grade 8 and 95.9% in Grade 10 feel *Safe* or *Very Safe* at school on an average day. All Grade 4, Grade 8 and Grade 10 students attending Brookline Public Schools answered this question. While this is baseline data, an inference can be made that since the inception of the grant reduced student fear numbers have dropped or at the very least stayed the same.

<sup>11</sup> These figures indicate arrests not incidents.

A Chemical Health Policy is in effect at Brookline High School and the policy is consistently administered with violators being referred to the Substance Abuse Prevention Program for counseling and services.

*Outcome Measure #5: Reduced Student Fear*

**Unable to measure.**

The results of the survey were not available at the time this report was completed.

*Outcome Measure #6: Increased satisfaction with handling of problem*

**Yes, there was an increase in satisfaction with way in which the drug/alcohol problem was addressed.**

Substance Abuse Intervention Services Program Outcome Reports indicate self-referrals increased to the Substance Abuse Prevention Program from 24 in the 1998-99 school year to 139 in the 1999-00 school year.

Over the last two years, the Substance Abuse Program conducted numerous interviews with involved parents who reported satisfaction with the services their children were provided, the family support they received, as well as approval of the Chemical Health Policy developed for the high school.

*Outcome Measure #7: Reduced costs associated with problem*

**Yes, most likely there was a reduction in costs associated with the drug/alcohol problem.**

The District Safe and Drug-Free Reporting Form has a section on *Other School and Community Information Concerning Safety and Substance Abuse*. One of the categories listed in Custodial Staff and reports the following:

	98-99	99-00	00-01
In an average week, how many liquor bottles or cans do custodians find on school property	2	1	0
How many times this year has the custodial staff had to remove hate-related graffiti from school property	2	0	0

Less litter and graffiti may translate into a reduction of custodial costs associated with alcohol and substance use.

Interviews with project staff yielded a few stories of students who were having academic difficulties and referred to the Special Education department. Unknown at the time of referral was that the students had substance use/abuse problems. Upon detection of these issues and intervention services provided, academic problems abated and the students were able to be placed back into mainstream classes. Special education costs are substantially higher than administering the Substance Abuse Prevention Program.

*Outcome Measure #8: Fewer suspensions or other discipline*

**Yes, there were fewer suspensions and other disciplinary punishments**

As mentioned before, the Substance Abuse Intervention Services Program Outcome Reports indicate there were 34 school violation referrals in the 1998-99 school year and 26 school violation referrals in the 1999-00 school year. All students who violate the Chemical Health Policy are mandated on a first offense to attend the Substance Abuse Prevention Program. While the program dropout rate for the last two years remains constant at 23%, the reduction in the number of students violating the policy causes fewer suspensions as a result.

Also, students have a variety of routes that they can be referred to the program hence preventing discipline problems. Referral routes include from police, probation officers, school violation, school voluntary, parent/family member, and self-referral.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

The School-Based Partnership Substance Abuse Prevention Grant completed the work it was funded to do. One major result is that the citizens, police, health officials, school officials, students, and parents of the Town of Brookline have developed a unique understanding of the multiple and interrelated issues of teen drug and alcohol use in their community. The community also has a better understanding of the impact of substance abuse to the individual, other students, school behavior, parents, and in many other areas. Based on the ongoing review of initial data from the analysis activities, a range of pilot responses and intervention initiatives designed to work toward a problem resolution have been instituted, continues, extended or planned. Many, if not all, of the responses identified through this grant are being sustained and incorporated into current programming efforts.

**Was the project implemented and operated as planned using SARA Problem Solving Model?**

**Yes.** The project staff moved forward in a thorough and methodical way keeping true to their original proposed project. Project staff also enlarged their problem solving efforts to include middle school students. Their major focus of the project has been with the analysis and response phases of the SARA Problem Solving Model. Data were gathered from a wide range of stakeholder groups. A final grant report was authored by Alan Amtzis and Mary Minott in January 2001. The report summarizes the analysis information into a findings format that identifies broad issues, risk and protective factors, and makes nine findings and recommendations. In May 2001 the report findings and recommendations were presented to community stakeholders and follow-up to that meeting is scheduled.

The authors of the grant Final Report note that “*an interesting feature of the SARA model is that, in line with emerging practices in education based research, it relies of cyclical, reflective, re-evaluative processes that depend on a combination of traditional and novel research methods. It acknowledges the individualized nature of problem manifestation in differing communities and looks toward tailor made development of each of the SARA phases. The various phases, as outlined above, may be roughly linear, but inform each other, reference each other, often criss-cross and require periodic re-formulation in an effort to provide more specific and meaningful interventions. Methods generally defined as either quantitative or qualitative interweave to*

*provide a multi-layered portrait with a more realistic, 3 dimensional understanding of the problem.”*

**Was the project fully utilized and was it utilized for the targeted crime problem area?**

**Yes.** The project addressed teen alcohol and substance use issues and concerns at Brookline High School, in the community and also reached out to eight middle schools located in the town. The project incorporated stakeholders across the community including, victims, offenders, students, parents, teachers, liquor storeowners, police, school program staff, community program staff, local juvenile probation officers and judges, and other community members.

The most significant impact of the project may be the breadth and depth of information collected and analyzed on teen alcohol and drug use and how the Town of Brookline can move forward in addressing the issue. Many of the programmatic responses are still in place and will be sustained and incorporated into current programming efforts.

**Recommendations**

1. Stakeholders who have worked to diligently on this grant should continue to meet periodically to revisit the **Final Report** findings and recommendations in order to continue moving forward with addressing the alcohol and substance abuse issues of Brookline youth.
2. It would be helpful for police, school and health department officials to explore new strategies and options on how the strengthen their existing relationships.