

Teen Court CLA-Style Performance Task

SCENARIO

You are a new staff member working in the juvenile court office located in Midwest City, North Carolina - an average sized metropolitan area. Residents of the city have been complaining that juvenile crime is on the increase and they want something done to reduce juvenile crime. The court has received a \$1 million grant to implement a program aimed at reducing juvenile crime. The director of the juvenile court has asked you to help decide if a teen court program should be implemented using the grant money.

Teen Court is an alternative, voluntary program, which offers young first-time, nonviolent offenders an opportunity to make restitution for an offense through community service, specialized classes and jury service, thus avoiding fines and keeping the juvenile's record clear. By bringing the teens before a jury of their peers, which sentences them to constructive service in a community service organization and jury duty, this program seeks to deter teens from future unlawful behavior, while providing direct experience in the judiciary system and an understanding of their future role as a productive citizen.

QUESTION

Your job is to determine whether the city should implement a teen court to reduce juvenile crime. The director of the juvenile court must make her decision in two weeks. In advance of the decision, you must write a response clearly stating if the teen court should be implemented.

Read and evaluate Documents A through E.

Then write a response answering the following – make sure each of your answers are numbered and correspond to the questions:

1. What are the arguments for and against teen court?
2. What are the ethical implications of implementing teen court?
3. Given the evidence provided, what are some of the diversity issues (e.g. race, disability, gender, etc.) that relate to the use of teen court?
4. Describe the data found in Documents A through E. What information about the use of teen court do you gather from the data?
5. Based on the evidence provided, would you support the grant money to implement teen court?
6. Which documents did you use to assist you in your decision? Explain whether or not each document was a credible source, moderately credible, or not credible at all and why.

DOCUMENT A

Success Story from Santa Barbara County Teen Court

From Gangster to Teen Leader: Aaron's Story

Aaron resisted the temptations of gang activity until around the age of 14. He then began to vandalize public and private property and get in fights with other teens. Aaron's allegiance to his gang-affiliated friends and neighborhood began to run so deep that his daily priority was to spend time in the streets with his comrades and his girlfriend. This gangster lifestyle could have brought him much more serious pain and trouble if he had not been cited one day for vandalism. This non-violent crime was Aaron's first offense and also his ticket to Teen Court and to expanding his world.

Aaron's Teen Court hearing was not a pleasant experience for him, his Mother who observed, the judge, the jurors, or Teen Court staff. Aaron's inability to express himself severely handicapped him when the Teen Court jury left the courtroom to deliberate. It was apparent through his demeanor, maturity and his delicate smile that Aaron was a great young man with a lot of heart. He was unable, however, to express any emotion, remorse or explanation for the choices he had been making most recently in his life.

His sentence was quite lengthy and he accepted it in stride and with his head held high. He was sentenced to complete 10 nights of jury duty, 35 hours of community service, a letter of apology to his distraught mother, and attend a Life Choices Class.

Aaron ended up becoming a teen leader in the Teen Court program. He enjoyed participating on the teen jury so much that he completed his 10 mandated nights and then proceeded to attend six additional nights of jury duty for community service credit. He became an example of initiative, self-motivation, responsibility and organization. He arrived at all scheduled appointments early and communicated with Teen Court staff more often than any other client. Aaron was also exemplary in his comportment at the courthouse. His peers, Teen Court judges and staff alike appreciated his respectful composure and mature attitude. His participation on the jury was also stellar, as he became one of Teen Court's most frequent case presenters and deliberation leaders.

DOCUMENT B

NEW YORK TIMES article

In the small town of Tarrytown, NY police statistics indicate that the number of juveniles younger than 16 who were arrested for misdemeanors dropped to 47 last year from 134 the year before – the year the teen court was established.

“We didn’t have one incident of vandalism this Halloween,” said Detective Michael A. Piedimonte of Tarrytown, an advisor to the Youth Court. While he noted that rainy weather might have been a factor, he added that the court had a major impact on reducing incidents of vandalism, criminal mischief and other minor crimes. “The graffiti we used to have around the village is now almost nonexistent,” he said, noting that a number of youths prosecuted in the Youth Court for spray painting buildings were later sentenced to clean them up.

Besides providing an alternative to the Family Court system, a Youth Court provides an outlet for young people interested in getting experience with our system of justice – they learn advocacy skills, analytical skills and speaking skills. Detective Piedimonte said some of the students who were prosecuted as offenders had later become actively involved as members of the court.

DOCUMENT C

RECENT SCHOLARLY/PEER REVIEWED RESEARCH ON TEEN COURTS

1. Butts, Buck, and Coggeshall (2002): studied teen court programs in Alaska, Arizona, Maryland, and Missouri - used comparison groups and found significantly lower six month recidivism rates in 2 of the 4 teen courts they studied. From: *The Impact of Teen Court on Young Offenders*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
2. Seyfrit, Reichel, & Stutts (1987): studied the Delaware teen court program - used a control group and found that teen court involvement did not reduce re-offense rates. From: *Peer Juries as a Juvenile Justice Diversion Technique*. Youth and Society.
3. Butts & Buck (2000): recidivism rates for teen court programs across the United States range from 3% to 30%. From: *Teen Courts: A focus on research*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
4. Weisz et al. (2002): studied a medium sized Midwestern urban area - compared teen court volunteers to traditional diversion participants and found that 13% of the teens that had entered the teen court program had re-offended within a year whereas 24% of the traditional diversion program had re-offended within a year. From: *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*.
5. Dick et al (2003): examined self-reported recidivism (repeat offending) in Utah's teen court system. Found that only 12% of those attending teen court were re-arrested 6-12 months after completion of teen court; whereas 49% of those who did not attend teen court were re-arrested within 6-12 months after appearing in traditional juvenile court. From: *Journal for Juvenile Justice and Detention Services*.
6. Minor, et al. (1999): studied the Kentucky teen court system and found that 32% of the cases recidivated at least once within one year after completing their teen court experience. Over half (57%) of those who did not attend teen court recidivated at least once within one year after appearing in traditional juvenile court. From: *Crime and Delinquency*.
7. Harrison, et al. (2001): studied the New Mexico teen court system and found that 17% of those who completed teen court re-offended; whereas 36% of those who appeared in traditional juvenile court re-offended. From: *Crime and Delinquency*.

DOCUMENT D

TABLE 1

Recidivism Rates for Teen Court and Diversion – Offenders by Year

From: Kirby, “Three Years of Teen Court Offender Outcomes” *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* (2008).

YEAR	Teen Court	Diversion
Year 1	14%	31%
Year 2	12%	25%
Year 3	25%	80%

Recidivism: juvenile court appearance subsequent to previous charge

Diversion: a strategy to redirect juveniles who qualify away from prison and toward community-based programs.

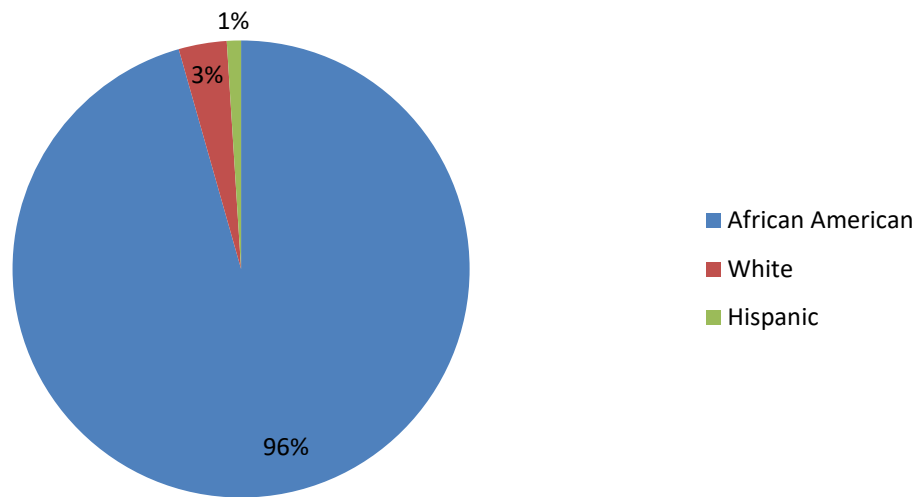
Definitions from: **Criminal Justice in Action: The Core (2012)**

DOCUMENT E

Baltimore City Teen Court

Gallagher, et al, (2015) "Who Is Most Likely to Graduate from Teen Court?" *Journal of Forensic Social Work*, 5:49-66.

Referrals by Ethnicity



Completion by Ethnicity

