

ATLANTA-DEKALB ALCOHOL ABUSE PREVENTION INITIATIVE'S STATE PRIORITY: REDUCE EARLY ONSET OF ALCOHOL USE AMONG 9-20 YEAR OLDS

Due to the growing concern about the often unnecessary involvement of youth into the juvenile justice system, many local jurisdictions have established programs and practices that divert youth from the juvenile justice system. While these efforts share the **common goal of preventing further contact with the juvenile justice system**, the means and structure used to accomplish that goal many vary. Administrative sanctions or diversion programs can vary widely in terms of the target population, who makes the decisions, the point in the system at which youth are referred, how charges are handled, consequences and benefits of successful and unsuccessful program completion, and services that are provided.¹

The Problem: Underage Drinking

Alcohol is the most commonly used drug among our Nation's young people, surpassing tobacco and other illegal drugs.

- Findings from the Atlanta DeKalb Alcohol Abuse Prevention Initiative **community needs assessment**, identified the average age of onset for alcohol use is 11-12 years of age in the focus communities.
- Identified **contributing factors** include
 - youth perception of peer norms
 - low perceived risk of being charged
 - arrested or of penalties from parents
 - cultural acceptability

The Solution: Administrative Sanctions

THE COUNCIL ON ALCOHOL AND DRUGS is a substance abuse prevention and education agency that develops programs, services and materials based on the most current research on alcohol and other drug use and its impact on communities. The Council's **Atlanta-DeKalb Alcohol Abuse Prevention Initiative (AAPI)** focuses on **five target communities** in the City of Atlanta and DeKalb County that include:

- Southeast Atlanta** Neighborhoods: (Ormewood Park, Mechanicsville, Summerhill, Thomasville Heights)
- Southwest DeKalb County**
- Chamblee** (30341)
- Clarkston** (30021)
- Stone Mountain** (30083)

Strengthening the Administrative Sanctions

in our communities will increase youth and parents perception of risk of such sanctions as consequence of underage drinking which will assist in reducing the early onset of alcohol use.²

- Educate youth and parents on laws** and penalties as well as health consequences of drinking.
- Require parents to attend** court and admin sanction programs with their youth who have been cited for an underage drinking offense.
- Secure funding:** Jurisdictions developing or implementing administrative sanction programs must determine how the program will be funded and sustained for both the short and the long run.
- Incentives should be employed** in order to motivate youth and caretakers to meet the terms of the administrative sanction program and to ensure successful program completion
 - Consequences of Failure to Comply:** Consequences must be specified for youth since some may have trouble fulfilling the terms of their diversion, either by failing to comply with the program's requirements or by declining to participate altogether.
 - Outcome Evaluation:** To ensure an administrative sanction program is meeting its objectives and goals, a recordkeeping and data collection system should be in place to assist in providing periodic evaluations.

Types of Sanctions or Penalties that are used in the AAPI Communities

Schools, courts, Department of Driver Services, and associated diversion programs have a number of sanctions available for responding to youth brought before them who have engaged in underage drinking.

FINES

- Common sanction imposed on youth for underage drinking. Law Enforcement officials generally believe that fines are not an effective deterrent to underage drinking.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

- Depending on jurisdiction, boundaries of community service to be not less than 24 nor more than 32 hours.
- It is recommend that community service take place in locations where the youth are most likely to see the effects of alcohol abuse.

MANDATORY DRUG TREATMENT

- Referral for assessment and, if necessary, mandated treatment of alcohol dependence or abuse is another response often available to courts.
- If underage drinkers are more likely to stay in treatment when they are under court order

LICENSE SUSPENSION

- The suspension may be mandatory or discretionary and will depend on the age of the youth, civil or criminal in nature.
- Law enforcement personnel strongly believe that license revocation is an effective deterrent because of important to most youth.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

- These specialized classes are designed to deal with alcohol-related issues to inform youth of the consequences of their alcohol-related behavior.
- It may be that education that occurs in conjunction with other sanctions enhances the effect of the education program.

SCHOOL INVOLVEMENT

- Georgia requires law enforcement officers to notify the school of an alcohol possession violation (Georgia Code 20-2-1185).
- This approach provides greater monitoring of the offender and therefore may help to change behavior.

INCARCERATION

- Incarceration is the most severe form of sanction and appears to be used far less frequently for underage drinking offenses than other sanctions.
- It has been recommended that incarceration be short term rather than long term because of assertions that short-term incarceration will be more effective.³

¹ Models for Change Juvenile Diversion Workgroup. (March 2011). Juvenile Diversion Guidebook. Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, National Juvenile Defender Center, National Youth Screening and Assessment Project, and Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps

^{2,3} National Research Council (US) and Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Developing a Strategy to Reduce and Prevent Underage Drinking; Bonnie RJ, O'Connell ME, editors. Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2004. 8, Effectiveness of Sanctions and Law Enforcement Practices Targeted at Underage Drinking Not Involving Operation of a Motor Vehicle.