

Disproportionate Minority Contact: San Diego County's Proactive Response

Over the past 20 years, stakeholders at all levels of government (federal, state, and local) have taken steps to identify and understand disproportionate minority contact (DMC) in the juvenile justice system. In broad terms, DMC is the overrepresentation of African American, Latino, and/or Native American youth in the juvenile justice system in comparison to their composition in the general population and more specifically, in comparison to White youth. While researchers have documented the existence of minority overrepresentation in the system, the actual implementation of reduction strategies, as well as the subsequent assessment of their effectiveness, has been minimal. Despite the Department of Justice's mandate (through a series of revised legislation starting in the 1980s) that each state take steps to address DMC, few have actually made progress in this area.

In 2002, San Diego County, without initial funding or directive from the State, was proactive by forming a DMC Committee to identify and address any overrepresentation issues in the local juvenile justice system. Under the leadership of The Children's Initiative and the San Diego County Probation Department, key juvenile justice stakeholders, through their involvement on and commitment to the Committee, effectively worked together with the common goal of reducing any racial disparity that may exist in the juvenile justice system. To help further their efforts, San Diego County applied for, and was one of five counties to receive a DMC Enhanced Targeted Assistance Project (TAP) grant from the California Corrections Standards Authority (CSA). Utilizing national DMC reduction models to guide their efforts, the Committee partnered with the Criminal Justice Research Division of SANDAG to conduct a thorough review and analysis of the local juvenile justice system. The results of this research identified the existence of DMC in the local system. Specifically, compared to White youth, African American youth were overrepresented at two points in the juvenile justice system: pre-adjudication (i.e., detention into juvenile hall) and institutional commitment. Hispanic youth were found to be overrepresented at the point of pre-adjudication. Additionally, multiple factors were found to contribute to this overrepresentation (e.g., truancy, prior criminal history, and gang involvement). Having a clearer picture and understanding of DMC in the local juvenile justice system allowed the DMC Committee to develop strategic recommendations to begin reducing DMC in the system (Table 1). The DMC Committee will use third year funding from the TAP grant to implement the recommendations in the coming year.

Table 1
SAN DIEGO COUNTY DMC REDUCTION PLAN

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| • Examine the Detention Intake Process | • Improve Family Access to the Juvenile Justice System |
| • Explore Appropriate Alternatives to Detention | • Improve Communication Between Juvenile Justice Partners |
| • Strengthen and Expand the Involvement of Stakeholders in the DMC Process | • Examine the Application of the Probation Risk Assessment Tool |
| • Address the Pathways to Delinquency and Enhance Prevention Services | • Identify What Works |
| • Adhere to Recommended Probation Caseload Ration Standards | • Ensure Cultural Competency |
| | • Institute Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation of DMC Efforts |

SOURCE: SANDAG; San Diego County's Juvenile Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC): Identification and Assessment, December 2008.