

Recommendations for the DSCP CBAC

March 27, 2006

Process: The DSCP CBAC is struggling to rebuild itself, almost from scratch. It currently has only two citizen members, both of whom are fairly new to the committee. Xander Patterson, joined in the summer of 2004, but he has devoted most of his time to working on the budget process with the Basic Living Needs citizen committee and Outcome Team, so his experience with the DSCP is limited. James Woods joined in January, 2006. The committee has held only three meetings, one of which was an orientation. We have interviewed only Kathy Tinkle, the department liaison, and Lorenzo Poe, the department Director. We hope to be able to offer more detailed recommendations next year.

Major Changes in department offers: Most changes are expansions of existing programs and reintroduction of cancelled ones. New offers include

- Diversion Service System that restores the County's preadjudicatory system for youths involved in low-severity offenses;
- Domestic Violence Gang Services;
- Youth Gang Prevention in partnership with DCJ and DCHS.

Recommendations/concerns: The Department of School and Community Partnerships Citizens Budget Advisory Committee is very supportive of the new priority-based budgeting and is pleased that the process is improving both in the quality of the offers and the measures. We are pleased to see that strategies laid out by the Education Outcome Team and by the DSCP Director in his budget transmittal are in close alignment.

Measures – Budget cuts in recent years have diminished DSCP's capacity to measure the effectiveness of its programs. The CBAC would like to see this capacity restored and to see continued improvement in the measures provided in program offers. Performance measures are the basic accounting of social services. They are the register tape, journal and ledger needed to justify the continuation and expansion of programs. The program offer measures have improved significantly over last year, but they still need much improvement.

Desired improvements:

- Measures should include unit costs that are meaningful and, ideally, comparable to other programs. Some should be output oriented (\$ per visit, or client served, for example). Others outcome oriented (\$ per client successfully served). We recognize that there are all kinds of complications arriving at these measures, but we think it is very valuable to try to develop them.

- Performance measures (outcome accounting) should focus only on the incremental benefit of program offers. The benefits of a program should always be weighed against a baseline, or what would happen if the program did not exist.
- Outcome measurement should not be restricted to easy to measure items. From the moment an outcome objective is stated resources are devoted to achieving that objective. Limiting “outcome accounting” to that which is easy to measure will result in many programs being on-time and on-budget, but achieving little else.
- Like financial accounting, measuring objectives is not inexpensive nor should it be left for untrained, non-professional, staff. Program offer 21001A, DSCP Operations, provides \$1,424,036 for “financial accounting” services for all program offers. Equal funding for the more difficult “outcome accounting” is probably a minimum requirement. It is preferable these “outcome accounting” funds be included as a line-item in each offer.

Even improved measures will not necessarily capture all the benefits of certain programs and all the considerations that go into evaluating whether a program warrants funding. We hope the BCC will strive to maintain balance between prevention, intervention, and treatment and bear in mind the unmeasured benefits of prevention as a long-term investment that will improve lives and save the County money far into the future. We especially favor programs that increase high school graduation rates such as 21015 and 21033. Lochner and Morettie have estimated that for each additional student that graduates from high school the costs to society from crime, crime prevention and incarceration drop by \$1,170 to \$2,100 per year for forty years.

Another unmeasured benefit can be the “spillover” impact of a County program in making private sector markets work better. For example, offer 21038 Standards Based Tutoring, provides services to some students, but its primary effect is to provide cost reducing incentives to the other commercial tutoring services. Similar programs have been effective in energy services and have been a model for public interventions that improve the functioning of markets.

A third unmeasurable the BCC should consider is the synergy or interdependence of certain programs. The existence of one program can make many others more effective. SUN Schools (21031) have an especially important positive impact on other programs such as Touchstone (21032). We feel fully funding SUN Schools should be the County’s highest priority in DSCP. We also believe extending Touchstone to a full twelve months will improve this program’s results in a cost-effective manner.

Sincerely,

Xander Patterson
James Woods, PhD