

## The Efficacy of Municipal Juvenile Diversion Programs in Tarrant County

Submitted to

The University of Texas at Arlington College of Architecture,  
Planning, and Public Affairs

and

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by

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## Executive Summary

Criminal behavior among adolescents can range from minor offenses such as curfew violations and truancy to much more serious crimes such as assault and other crimes against persons. Creating an alternative to more traditional adjudication while also providing for the safety and well-being of the community at large is vital. For the municipalities of Tarrant County, Texas, addressing these more minor behaviors in a manner that provides rehabilitation for the offender while not causing a logjam in the traditional juvenile court systems has been accomplished using a variety of methods. Some of these municipalities have used Municipal Courts or Municipal Courts of Record to address lower-level juvenile criminal behaviors, while some have established, “Teen Courts” to provide a less harsh alternative for young offenders. Some methods have been more successful than others.

To determine the effectiveness of the various methods used to address juvenile criminal behavior in Tarrant County, a team of graduate students in the Public Administration Capstone at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) set the following goals and objectives:

- Goal 1: Examine and define Municipal Courts, Courts of Record, and Teen Courts according to Texas State Law, including how they are created and administered.
  - ◆ Objective 1: Define Municipal Courts, Courts of Record, and Teen Courts.
  - ◆ Objective 2: Identify which type of court(s) are used in each municipality being reviewed. Consider whether a correlation exists between the size of the municipality and the type of court in use.
  - ◆ Objective 3: Examine how these courts are created and administered.
- Goal 2: Identify various techniques to address adolescent behaviors currently in use by Municipal Courts, Courts of Record, and existing Teen Courts in the municipalities of Tarrant County, excluding Westover Hills, Fort Worth, Arlington, and Grand Prairie.
  - ◆ Objective 1: Research techniques used for addressing adolescents in Municipal Courts, Courts of Record, and Teen Courts in the including municipalities.
  - ◆ Objective 2: Determine major similarities and differences in techniques between the three (3) types of courts. Is the size of the municipality a factor?
  - ◆ Objective 3: Examine recidivism rates among teen offenders in municipalities utilizing teen courts. Determine if this differs from recidivism rates among teen offenders in municipalities without teen courts.
- Goal 3: Identify three (3) issues for consideration by future evaluators with specific focus on state oversight.

- ◆ Objective 1: Determine criteria for what should constitute an issue to be assessed by future reviewers. Focus should be placed on issues that would allow courts to have a greater impact on adolescent behaviors.
- ◆ Objective 2: Examine whether these issues have been examined related to Municipalities outside of Tarrant County. If so, what did these examinations determine?
- ◆ Objective 3: Determine a recommended timeframe for conducting this future review.

During the course of the semester, the capstone team interviewed key stakeholders currently employed in the juvenile court systems of Tarrant County. These interviews elicited professional opinions of key personnel related to the use of teen courts, what alternatives were utilized by Municipalities who were not utilizing teen courts, and how effective each stakeholder felt their Municipality's chosen method was in addressing juvenile criminal behavior. In addition, the capstone team created a comprehensive survey that was sent to all the Municipalities of Tarrant County (excepting Fort Worth, Arlington, Grand Prairie, and Westover Hills). The intent of this survey was to assess the effectiveness of each municipality's chosen method of addressing juvenile criminal behaviors, what municipalities not currently using a teen court saw as a barrier to the implementation of one, what impact curfews may be having on juvenile criminal behavior, and other applicable inquiries. Finally, the capstone team submitted Public Information Requests to municipalities to gather statistics related to the issuances of citations to juveniles and crime statistics related to the various methods utilized to address juvenile criminal behavior.

This report provides details of the methods the team used to gather data, the information gathered through these methods and subsequent research, and an assessment of the effectiveness of teen courts on juvenile crime. In addition, this report includes recommendations for additional topics to be reviewed by future teams.

## Introduction and Background

Criminal behavior among adolescents can range from minor offenses such as curfew violations and truancy to much more serious crimes such as assault and other crimes against persons. Creating an alternative to more traditional adjudication while also providing for the safety and well-being of the community at large is vital. For the municipalities of Tarrant County, addressing these more minor behaviors in a manner that provides rehabilitation for the offender while not causing a logjam in the traditional juvenile court systems has been accomplished using a variety of methods. Some of these municipalities have used Municipal Courts or Municipal Courts of Record to address lower-level juvenile criminal behaviors, while some have established, “Teen Courts” to provide a less harsh alternative for young offenders. Some methods have been more successful than others. Studies have suggested that alternative methods such as Teen Courts result in fewer re-offenders among adolescent populations (Norris, 2011). However, other studies have been inconclusive and have not resulted in positive outcomes (Laundra, 2013).

Teen Courts provide an alternative to traditional criminal prosecution for juvenile offenses. Teen offenders who have their cases heard in Teen Courts enter a plea of, “no contest” or “guilty,” but rather than entering this plea to a judge, their case is heard by a group of their peers. These peers are often juveniles who have themselves successfully completed the Teen Court program and been selected to become part of the group who hears cases or juveniles who have been sentenced to work in Teen Court as part of their own Teen Court case. In addition to fines, sentences in Teen Courts are community service, assignment to a Teen Court team, or a requirement to attend an educational program. Successful completion of a Teen Court sentence results in the offense being dismissed and it not appearing on the juvenile’s criminal record.

Teen Courts seek to exploit the impact of peer pressure by having a juvenile offender’s same age counterparts be the ones to sit in judgment over them. In addition, Teen Courts help shepherd juvenile offenders into service to the community without the stigma that comes with being labeled as a, “criminal”. Teen Courts also provide a goal for juvenile offenders in that successful completion of their sentence could result in them having the opportunity to sit in judgment on others. The sense of empowerment that comes with being granted a seat on the Teen Court bench can have a positive impact on juvenile offenders, rather than a more traditional prosecutorial model that is often viewed as being punitive. The goal of this type of juvenile court system is to educate young offenders in what constitutes appropriate behavior. Having their peers model appropriate behavior for them during their Teen Court case can provide an invaluable education.

The data gathered and analyzed in this report provides an assessment of the efficacy of juvenile diversion programs in Tarrant County. In addition to Teen Courts, Municipal Courts and Courts of Records will be assessed for their impact in lowering juvenile criminal activity in the Municipalities that currently utilize those methods. Finally, recommendations will be made for related topics for research and analysis by future teams. Note: This report excludes the

municipalities of Fort Worth, Arlington, Grand Prairie, and Westover Hills due to size of cities associated with this research.

## Methodology

To determine the effectiveness of the various methods used to address juvenile criminal behavior, the capstone team used a variety of techniques to gather information. These techniques included examination of relevant literature, surveys, phone interviews, and email correspondence. Information was acquired from city and court websites, court staff and administrators, as well as county and city law enforcement agencies.

A survey was designed to gather data from Tarrant County municipalities related to juvenile crime, the use of Teen Courts and what, if any, impact on crime the use of these courts may be having. Team members also reached out to key stakeholders currently employed in the court system to conduct interviews to gain an additional information concerning primary goal of the juvenile court system and the techniques used to correct delinquent juvenile behaviors and reduce recidivism. Additionally, both monthly and annual crime statistics were gathered from the courts and law enforcement agencies to evaluate recidivism rates. The team identified three (3) issues for consideration by future evaluators with specific focus on state oversight.

The capstone team used various methods (survey, interviews, and the direct request for judicial information) to help complete the goal of our project to determine the impact of juvenile diversion programs at the municipal level.

### *Survey*

The capstone team created a survey (See Appendix 5) to help gather data from Tarrant County municipalities related to juvenile crime. The survey featured ten (10) questions that helped to determine if the municipality has a teen court and what additional methods may be being utilized to prevent teen offenses. The questions were closed-ended questions with multiple choices to choose from.

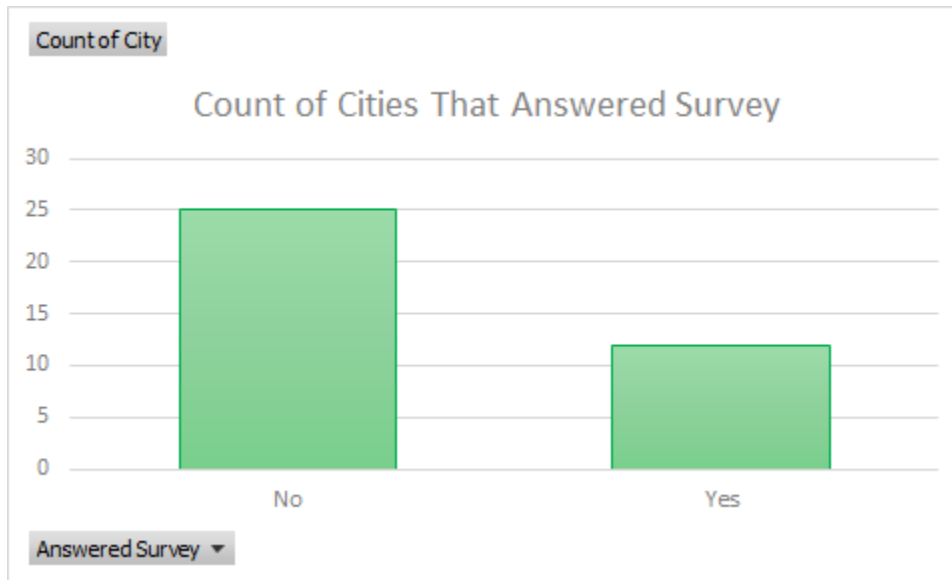
SurveyMonkey was used to design the survey. It was delivered via an email which contained a survey link, sent to each municipality. The survey and link were accessible from March 14, 2022, to March 21, 2022. However, due to a notable lack of responses, survey access was extended to March 26, 2022. Out of the thirty-eight municipalities that were emailed the SurveyMonkey link, twelve responded to the survey.

### *Methods*

The ten (10) question survey acted as a non-experimental data source and a purposive, non-probability sample that was selected based on the selection of municipalities for the objective of the survey. The survey could be easily accessed using the SurveyMonkey link emailed to each municipality.

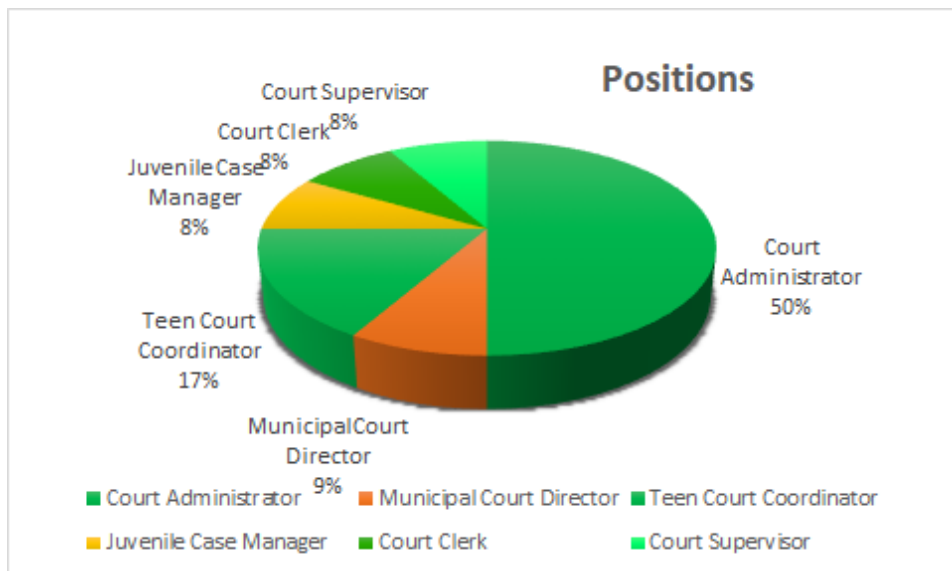
Survey Results

Chart 1. Count of Survey Respondents



Out of the thirty-seven (37) survey emails that were sent, the survey gathered data from twelve (12) different municipalities.

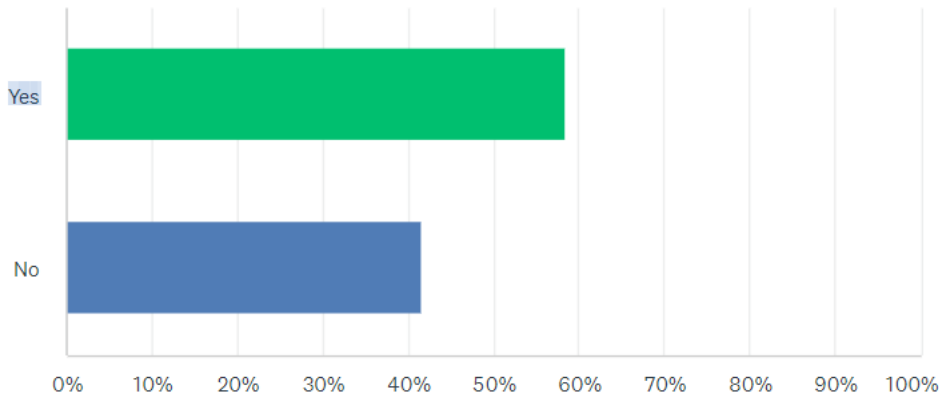
Chart 2. Job Titles of Respondents





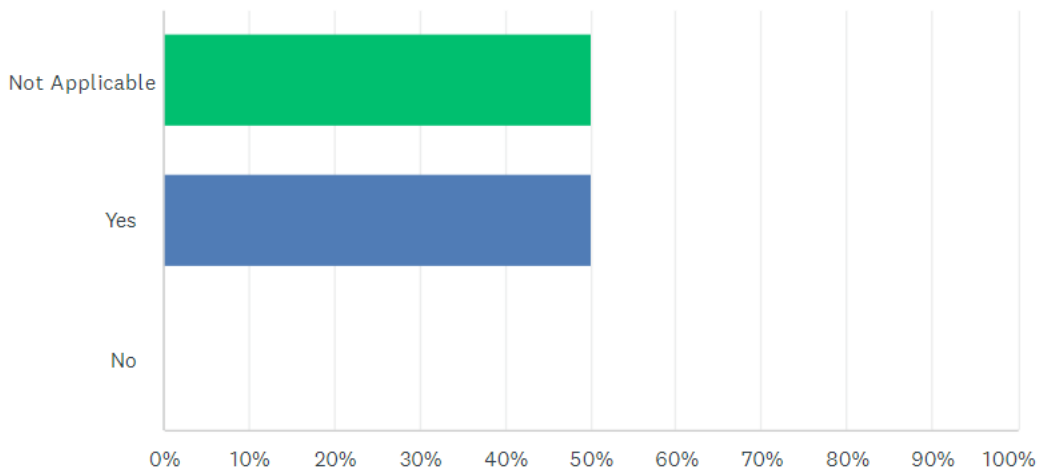
The respondents to the survey were primarily Court Administrators at 50% with the next highest respondent being Teen Court Coordinators at 17%, Municipal Court Director 9%, and Juvenile Case Manager, Court Clerk, and Court Supervisor all at 8%.

*Chart 3. Does your municipality utilize a teen court?*



The respondents were asked whether their municipality utilized a teen court in the form of a closed-ended question with the answer options of either yes or no. At 58.33%, more than half of the respondents reported that their municipality used a teen court while 41.67% reported that their municipality did not use a teen court.

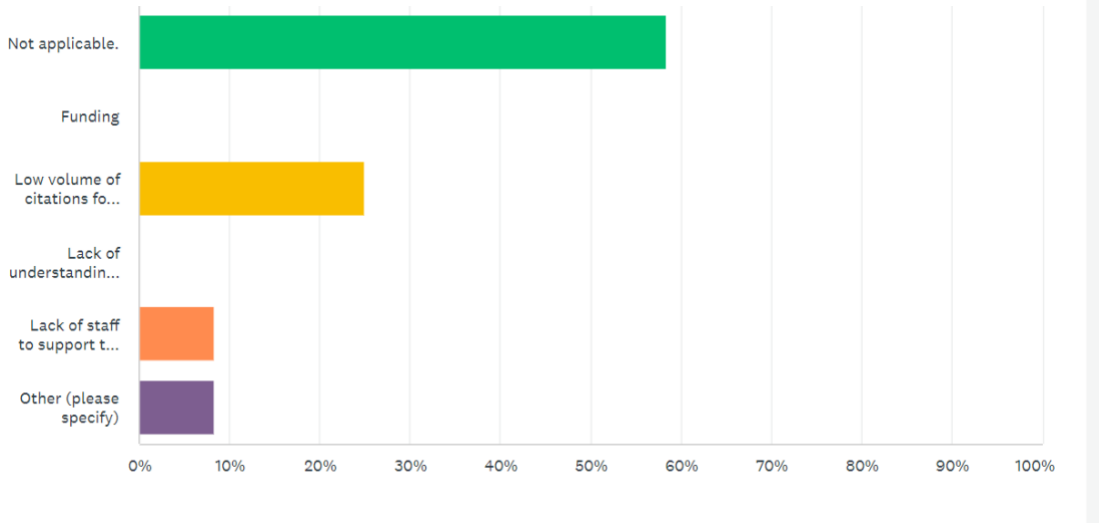
*Chart 4. If your municipality utilizes a teen court, do you feel it has been effective in reducing teen crime in your municipality?*



When respondents were asked whether they felt the use of a teen court had been successful in reducing teen crime within their municipality, 50% of respondents stated that they felt the use of

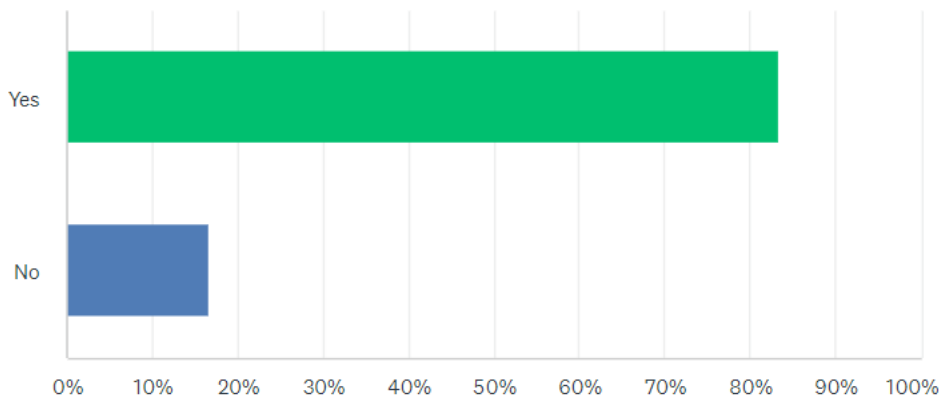
a teen court effectively reduced teen crime that while 50% stated that this question was not applicable to the municipality.

**Chart 5.** *If your municipality does not use a teen court, what prevents the use of a teen court?*



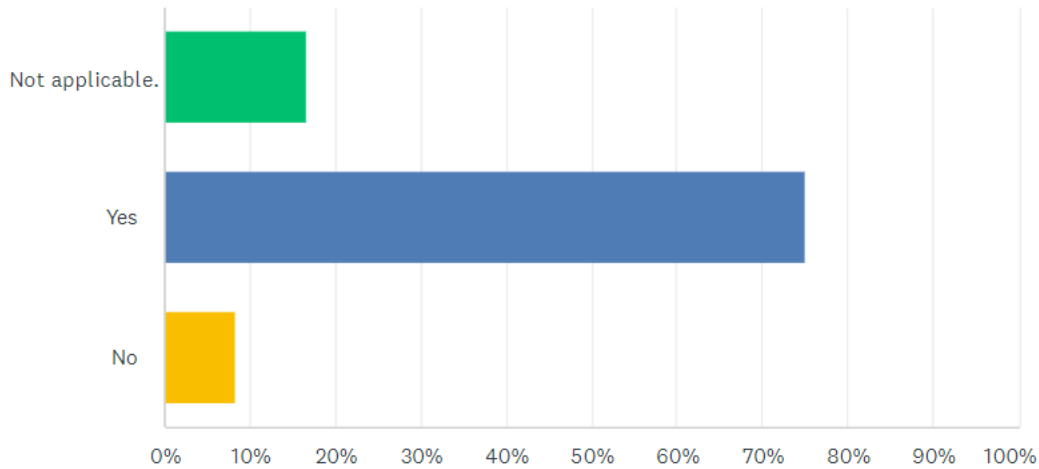
Targeted primarily towards those who answered that their municipality did not utilize a teen court, respondents were asked about what obstacles they felt prevented their municipality from using the program. Results indicated that 58.33% of respondents did not feel that this question was applicable to them, while 25% responded that their municipality had a low a volume of juvenile citations, 8.33% responded that they felt their municipality lacked the court staff to support a teen court, and the remaining 8.33% marked “other”, commenting that their municipality did not have a teen court but did have a juvenile diversion program.

**Chart 6.** *Does your municipality utilize a curfew for teenagers?*



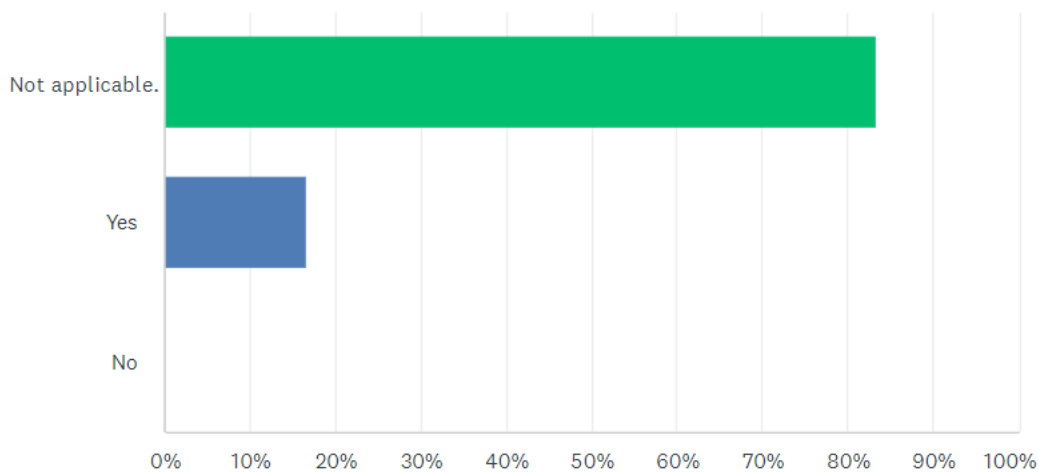
Asked if their municipality implements curfews for juveniles, 83.33% of respondents indicated that their municipality does implement a curfew while 16.67% indicated that their municipality does not.

**Chart 7.** *If your municipality utilizes a curfew for teenagers, do you feel that this curfew has been effective in reducing teen crime in your municipality?*



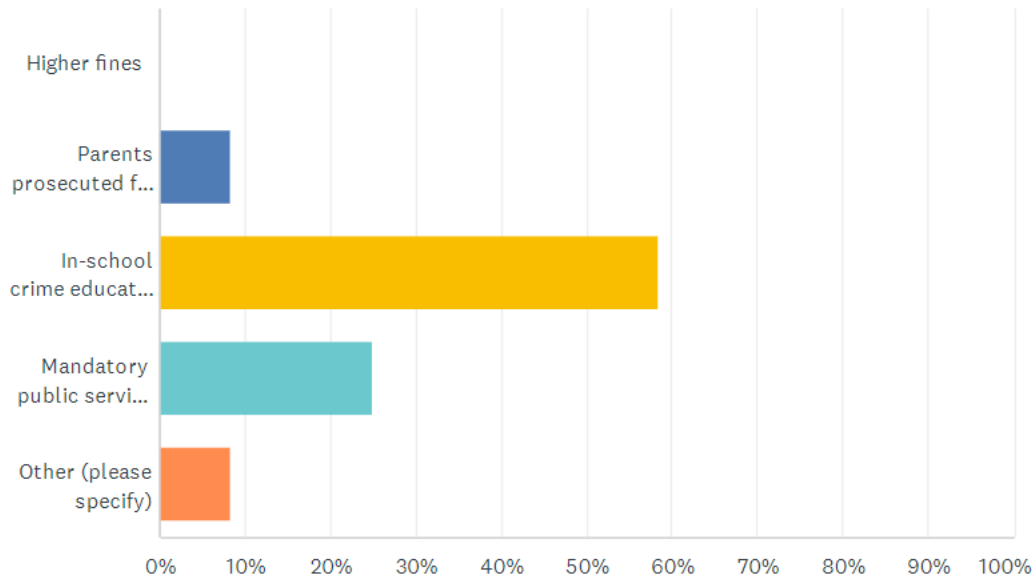
Of the municipalities that utilize a curfew for teenagers, 75% of respondents felt that teen curfews have been effective in reducing teen crime in the municipality. 16.67% of municipalities felt that this question was not applicable to them and 8.33% answered that no, they do not believe that teen curfews have been effective in reducing teen crime in their municipality.

**Chart 8.** *If your municipality does not utilize a curfew for teenagers, do you feel that a curfew would be helpful in reducing teen crime in your municipality?*



Of the municipalities that did not utilize a curfew for teenagers, 83.33% of respondents state that this question was not applicable to their municipality. 16.67% of respondents state that yes, they did feel a curfew would be helpful in reducing teen crime in their municipality, but they did not have one. No respondents answered no.

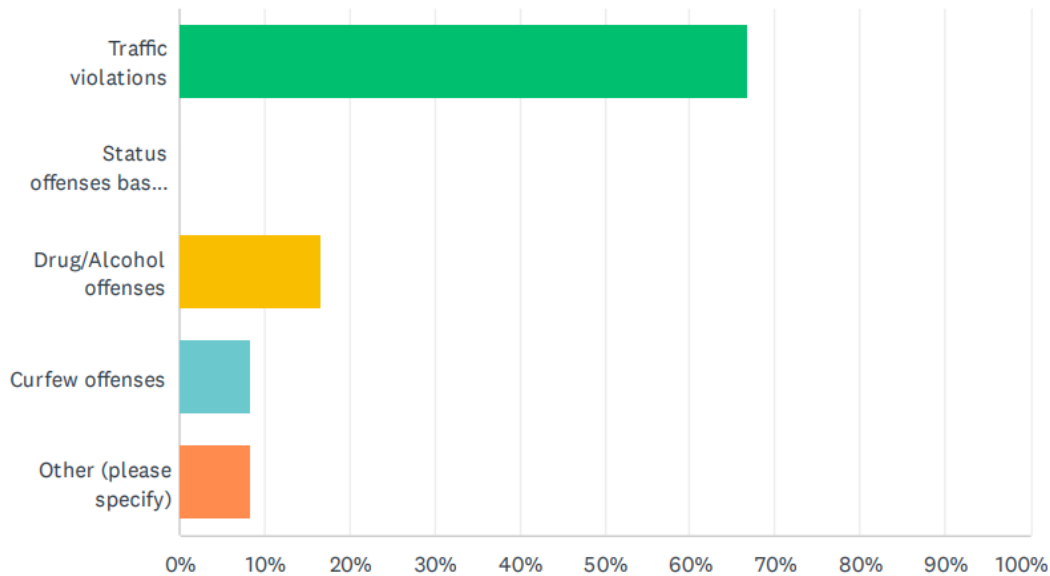
**Chart 9.** *In your opinion, what could be implemented in your municipality to reduce teen criminal offenses?*



The respondents were asked what they felt could be implemented to reduce teen criminal offenses in their municipality and were given several choices to choose from. 58.33% of respondents stated they believed in-school crime education programs would be beneficial. 25% of respondents responded that they believed mandatory public service for offenses would help. 8.33% indicated their belief that prosecuting parents for their child’s offenses would reduce teen crime offenses. 8.33% chose “other” and one municipality stated they do not have a school district, only an elementary school.

*(This space intentionally left blank due to size of Chart 10.)*

**Chart 10.** *Category of citations are issued against teen courts most often in your community?*



The respondents were given a choice of four offenses to choose from as an offense most often issued against teen courts in their community. The respondent was also able to choose “other” and specify their response. Out of the twelve (12) responses, 66.7% chose traffic violations, with Drug/Alcohol Offenses being next at 16.67%. and curfew offenses at 8.33%. One respondent chose “other” for 8.33% and specified that offense as “traffic, status offenses based on age, Class C misdemeanor drug offenses, and curfews”.

Overall, the results from the survey suggest that many of the respondents believe that teen courts do help to reduce teen crime.

#### *Validity and Reliability*

Our survey sample size was small as less than half of the municipalities responded to the survey. Considering this sample does not reflect all or a sizable portion of the Tarrant County municipalities, the external validity of this survey is low. The reliability of the sample is high as the questions are closed-ended and could yield the same results if the survey is given at a future date to the same respondents.

It would be beneficial for the sake of validity to redistribute the survey again at a future date to see if additional municipalities answered the survey to increase the sample size and the external validity.

### *Limitations*

The major limitation to the survey was having to rely on responses of human assets to take the time to respond. To try to alleviate this issue, multiple reminders were sent to the municipalities to request they take the survey. Also, a team member reached out by telephone to those municipalities that had not responded to the survey and asked that they do so. One other limitation would be time constraints. Due dates were adjusted to give time to the municipalities to respond to the survey in hope of generating additional responses. In addition, some municipalities did not have a teen court. Team 1 had to determine which municipalities did not have teen court by using survey responses or searching municipality websites.

### *Interviews*

Team members created a set of six (6) open-ended questions for the interviews that would gather qualitative data to support the statistical data regarding whether a teen court was being utilized in a municipality, the most common type of offenses addressed in teen courts, and what impact, if any, teen courts had on recidivism rates. These six (6) questions led to additional questions based on how the respondent answered.

### *Method*

The capstone team interviewed four (4) members of various municipalities (See Appendix 16) by calling each municipality and requesting an interview with a judicial member until the desired number of four (4) interview subjects indicated a willingness to participate. Each interview was recorded and transcribed by the team member.

### *Results*

The team members were able to interview four (4) persons, three (3) court administrators and one (1) court clerk. Two (2) of the municipalities interviewed did not have a teen court, one did have a teen court and one municipality had juvenile cases but sees the juveniles in the same court as the adults. Those that did have teen courts believe that they were successful in preventing juvenile offenses. The most common types of citations issued against teens were reported to include speeding, driving without a license, drug/tobacco possession, and curfew violations. To help reduce recidivism, the municipalities reported the use of community service, fines, and educational programs such as alcohol awareness programs as ways to deter juvenile delinquency.

### *Limitations*

Scheduling conflicts were a limitation when dealing with the interviews. A few interviews had to be rescheduled to accommodate the respondent or interviewee. Flexibility was necessary, but everyone was accommodating and understanding.

### *Statistical Data*

A capstone team member emailed public information requests to the municipalities who are the subject of this paper (See Appendix 4) to gather data relating to the correlation between the size of a municipality and the type of court used, to determine techniques used for addressing adolescent behaviors, and to examine recidivism rates among teen offenders in municipalities utilizing teen courts.

### *Method*

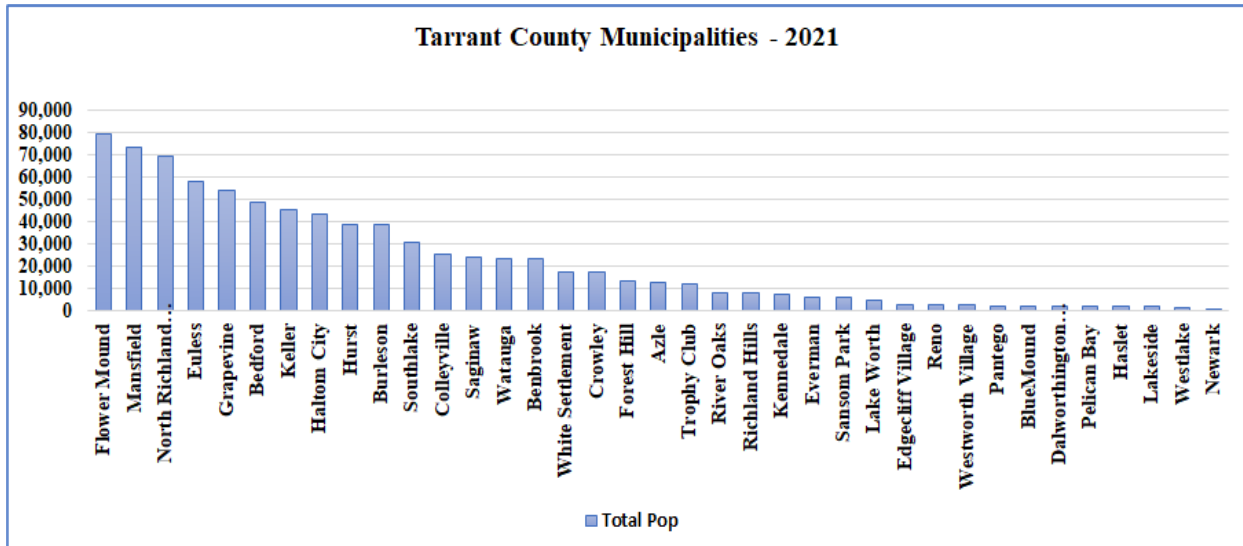
The public information request emailed to the municipalities with teen courts covered the years 2017 to 2021. The information requested regarded the number of cases referred to teen court from the municipal court per year, the number of cases that successfully completed the program per year, and the number of cases that did not complete the program successfully per year. Public information requests were emailed to police departments to request information regarding the total number of citations issued by the police department per year, the number of citations issued to an adult (aged 17 and older) by the police department per year, and the total number of citations issued by the police department for curfew violations (excluding any park curfew violations) per year for the years 2017 to 2021. Once the public information request was received by the municipalities and police departments, they had ten (10) days to respond to our requests but under Texas law, they had no set time frame to return the data.

### *Results*

Of the 37 municipalities examined, 16 report having an agreement with one or more neighboring municipalities in which local cases may be referred for judicial services. Of the 20 municipalities with populations of more than 10,000 but less than 80,000, 100% report having both a Municipal Court as well as a Court of Record. Of the 17 municipalities with a population of less than 10,000, 100% report having a Municipal Court while only 15 of those municipalities also report having a Court of Record.

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**Chart 11. Total Population of Municipalities**



This chart represents the Tarrant County Municipalities in 2021 and their population.

**Chart 12. Municipality Characteristics by Population Group**

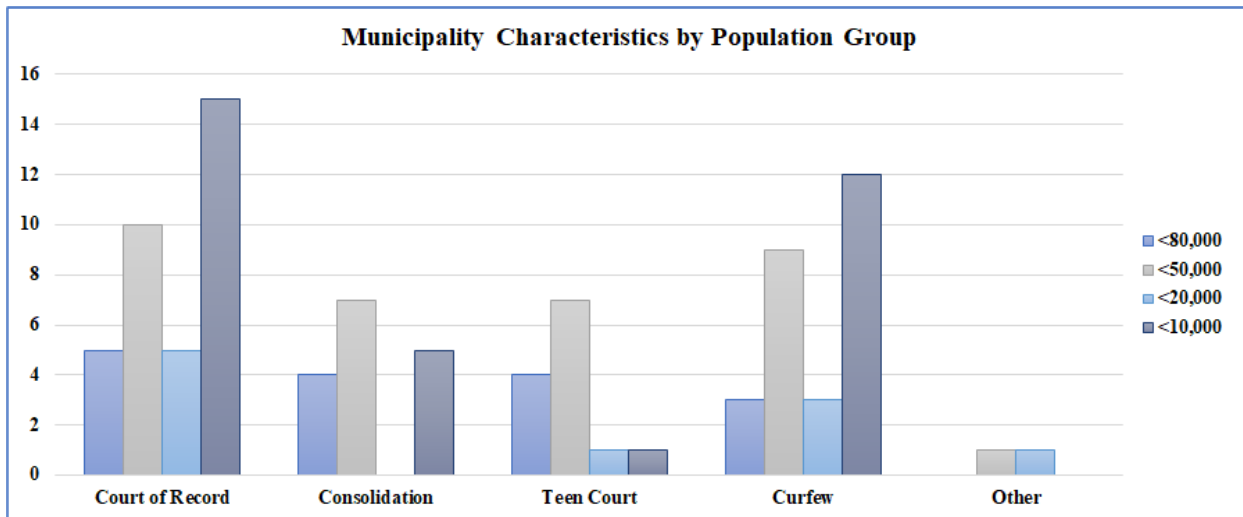


Chart 12 exhibits the municipality characteristics by population group.

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Chart 13. Court Characteristics

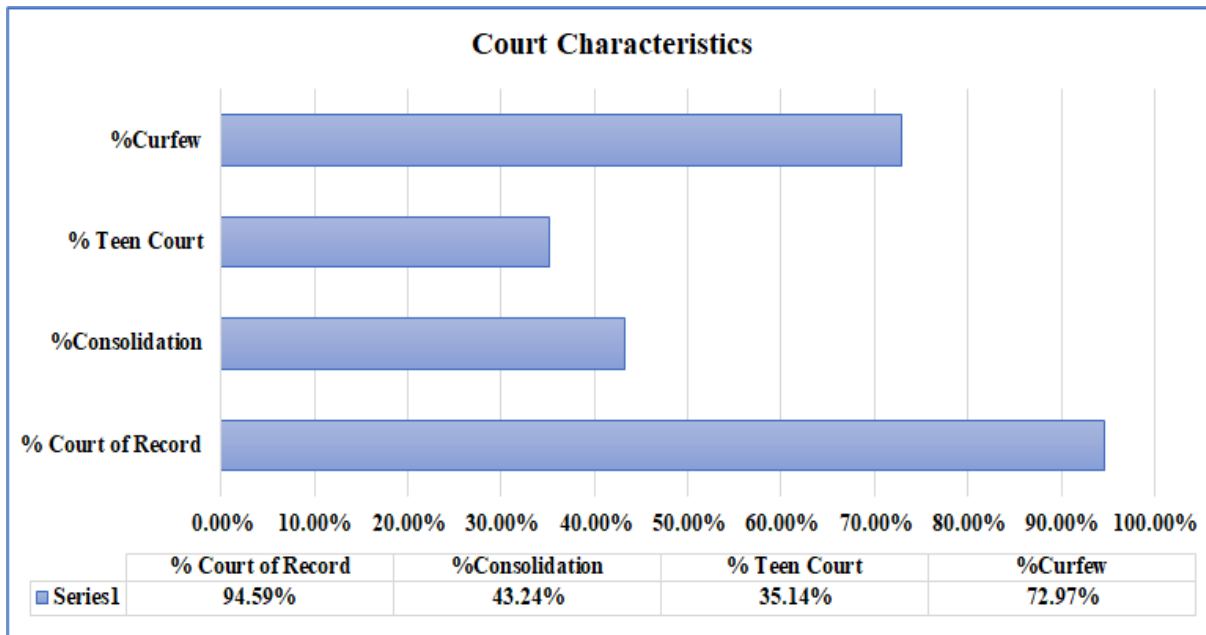


Chart 13 exhibits the characteristics of each municipality

Based on the data, there appears to be an association between the population of a municipality and the presence of a teen court. In a sample of 37 municipalities, 32.43% report the utilization of a teen court. However, the utilization of a teen court within the population of the municipalities varied. Of the municipalities with populations over 50,000 but less than 80,000, 80% indicated the use of a teen court. Of the municipalities with populations over 20,000 but less than 50,000, 70% were shown to utilize a teen court. Of the municipalities with populations of more than 10,000 but less than 20,000, 60% shared that they utilized a teen court. Yes, of the municipalities with a population of less than 10,000, only 5.88% reported utilizing a teen court.

The charts below also exhibit other techniques used to address adolescent behaviors such as the use of teen courts, the use of city curfews, and other programs. As part of teen court, fines and community service are often used as deterrents to reduce recidivism. Educational programs such as alcohol awareness are also used.

*(This space intentionally left blank due to the six of Chart 14.)*

**Chart 14. Municipalities with Populations less than 80,000 people**

Municipalities <80,000 2021										
City	Total Pop	Teen Court	Curfew Ordinance	Other Program	Total Crime	Crime Rate	Adult Arrest	Juvenile Arrest	Total	% Juvenile Arrest
Flower Mound	79,392	Y	Y	N	534	6.73	663	16	679	2.36%
Mansfield	73,505	N	N	N	981	13.35	942	7	949	0.74%
North Richland Hills	69,670	Y	Y	N	1721	24.70	1874	27	1901	1.42%
Eules	58,260	Y	Y	N	1455	24.97	1042	36	1078	3.34%
Grapevine	54,488	Y	N	N	1327	24.35	988	54	1042	5.18%
Total	335,315	4	3	0			5509	140	5649	2.48%

Chart 14 exhibits those municipalities with populations of less than 80,000 people, whether they have a teen court, whether they have a curfew ordinance or other programs, crime rate and arrest statistics.

**Chart 15. Municipalities with Populations less than 50,000 people.**

Municipalities <50,000 2021										
City	Total Pop	Teen Court	Curfew Ordinance	Other Program	Total Crime	Crime Rate	Adult Arrest	Juvenile Arrest	Total	% Juvenile Arrest
Bedford	48,810	Y	Y	N	1161	23.79	1725	52	1777	2.93%
Keller	45,660	Y	N	N	286	6.26	487	52	539	9.65%
Haltom City	43,450	Y	Y	N	1412	32.50	1511	30	1541	1.95%
Hurst	38,930	Y	Y	N	1010	25.94	1374	36	1410	2.55%
Burleson	38,632	N	Y	Y	939	24.31	741	24	765	3.14%
Southlake	30,637	Y	Y	N	312	10.18	478	27	505	5.35%
Colleyville	25,920	Y	Y	N	125	4.82	509	16	525	3.05%
Saginaw	24,150	N	Y	N	420	17.39	205	3	208	1.44%
Watauga	23,770	Y	Y	N	342	14.39	864	40	904	4.42%
Benbrook	23,480	N	Y	N	347	14.78	426	102	528	19.32%
Total	343,439	7	9	1			8320	382	8702	4.39%

Chart 15 exhibits those municipalities with populations of less than 50,000 people, whether they have a teen court, whether they have a curfew ordinance or other programs, crime rate and arrest statistics.

**Chart 16. Municipalities with Populations less than 20,000 people.**

Municipalities <20,000 2021										
City	Total Pop	Teen Court	Curfew Ordinance	Other Program	Total Crime	Crime Rate	Adult Arrest	Juvenile Arrest	Total	% Juvenile Arrest
White Settlement	17,830	N	Y	N	629	35.28	160	7	167	4.19%
Crowley	17,332	N	Y	N	343	19.79	330	9	339	2.65%
Forest Hill	13,410	N	Y	N	350	26.10	168	1	169	0.59%
Azle	12,941	N	N	Y	291	22.49	312	8	320	2.50%
Trophy Club	12,317	N	N	N	62	5.03	69	12	81	14.81%
Total	73,830	0	3	1			1039	37	1076	3.44%

Chart 16 exhibits those municipalities with populations of less than 20,000 people, whether they have a teen court, whether they have a curfew ordinance or other programs, crime rate and arrest statistics.

*Chart 17. Municipalities with Populations less than 10,000 people.*

Municipalities <10,000 2021										
City	Total Pop	Teen Court	Curfew Ordinance	Other Program	Total Crime	Crime Rate	Adult Arrest	Juvenile Arrest	Total	% Juvenile Arrest
River Oaks	8,320	N	Y	N	140	16.83	125	3	128	2.34%
Richland Hills	7,940	Y	Y	N	212	26.70	458	2	460	0.43%
Kennedale	7,700	N	Y	N	127	16.49	100	1	101	0.99%
Everman	6,110	N	Y	N	82	13.42	68	5	73	6.85%
Sansom Park	5,920	N	Y	N	144	24.32	49	2	51	3.92%
Lake Worth	4,620	N	Y	N	326	70.56	595	3	598	0.50%
Edgecliff Village	3,220	N	Y	N	NR	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK
Reno	3,089	N	N	N	58	18.78	30	7	37	18.92%
Westworth Village	2,750	N	Y	N	186	67.64	306	8	314	2.55%
Pantego	2,480	N	N	N	112	45.16	44	0	44	0
BlueMound	2,380	N	Y	N	4	1.68	76	0	76	0
Dalworthington Gardens	2,340	N	N	N	18	7.69	46	0	46	0
Pelican Bay	2,250	N	N	N	29	12.89	3	29	32	90.63%
Haslet	2,137	N	Y	N	NR	UNK	NR	NR	NR	UNK
Lakeside	2,120	N	Y	N	15	7.08	10	0	10	0
Westlake	1,839	N	N	N	NR	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK
Newark	1,160	N	Y	N	NR	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK	UNK
Total	66,375	1	12	0			1910	60	1970	3.05%

Chart 17 exhibits those municipalities with populations of less than 10,000 people, whether they have a teen court, whether they have a curfew ordinance or other programs, crime rate and arrest statistics.

To examine recidivism rates among teen offenders in municipalities utilizing teen courts, Capstone Team 1 used data obtained from several responding cities as to whether referrals to their teen courts were successful or unsuccessful.

*(This space intentionally left blank due to size of Chart 18.)*

*Chart 18. Euless Teen Court - HEB*

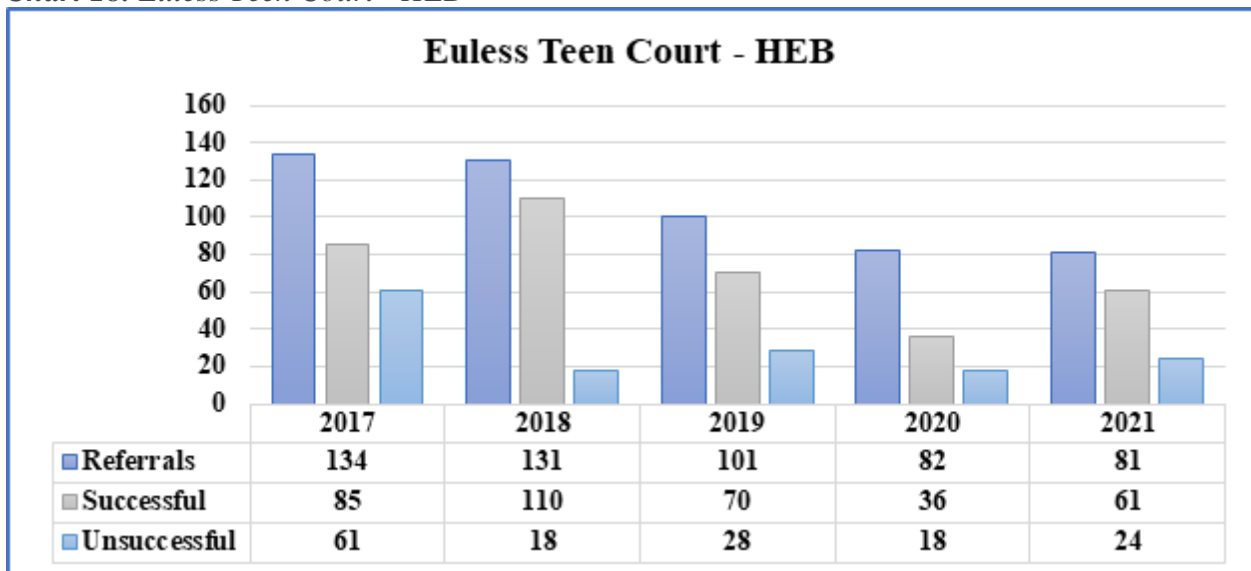


Chart 18 exhibits referrals made to the Euless Teen Court for the years of 2017 to 2021 and if the referral was successful or unsuccessful.

*Chart 19. Flower Mound Teen Court*

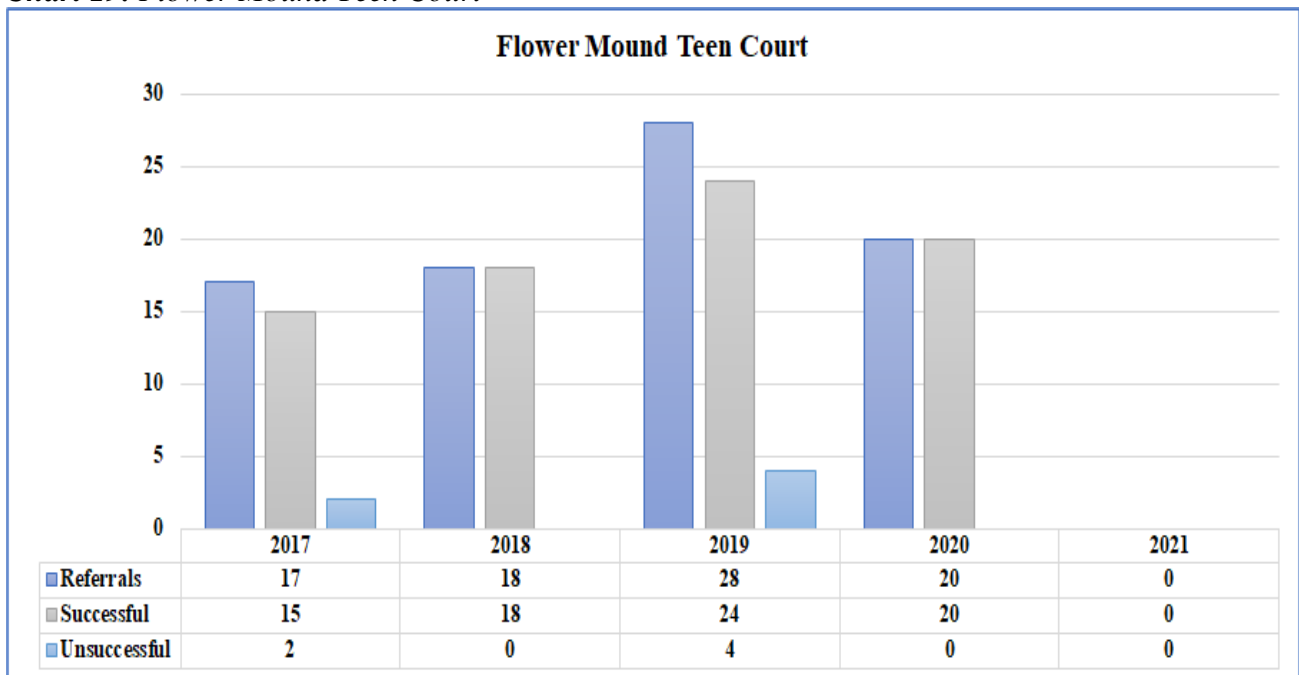


Chart 19 exhibits referrals made to the Flower Mound Teen Court for the years of 2017 to 2021 and if the referral was successful or unsuccessful.

*Chart 20. Grapevine Teen Court - Metroport*

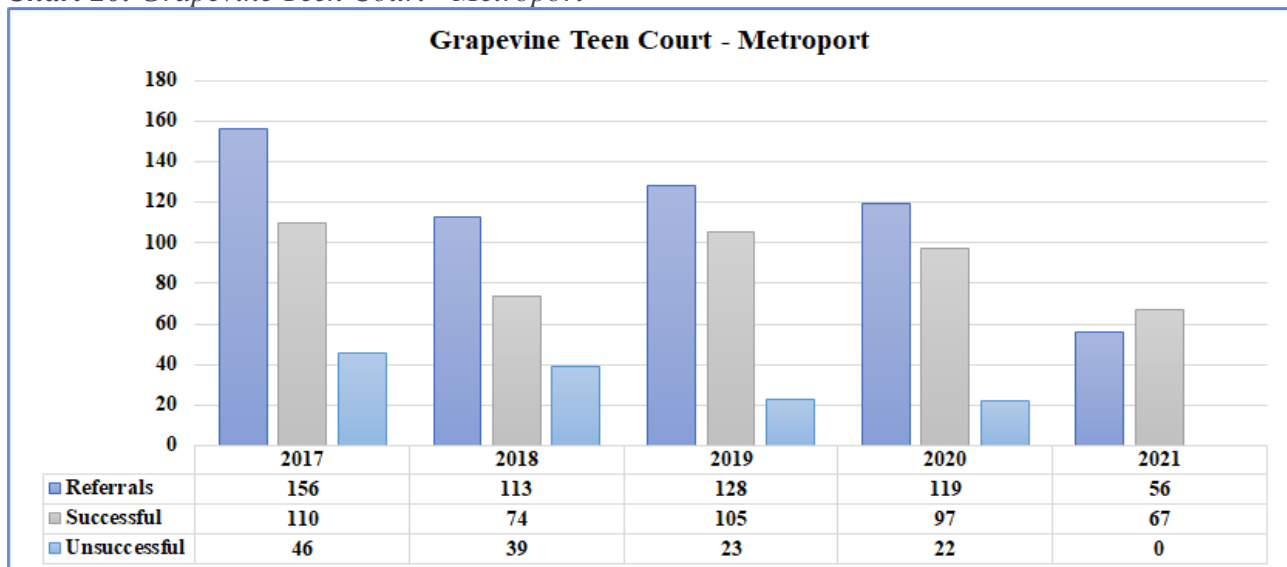


Chart 20 exhibits referrals made to the Grapevine Teen Court for the years of 2017 to 2021 and if the referral was successful or unsuccessful.

*Chart 21. North Richland Hills Teen Court - NETTC*

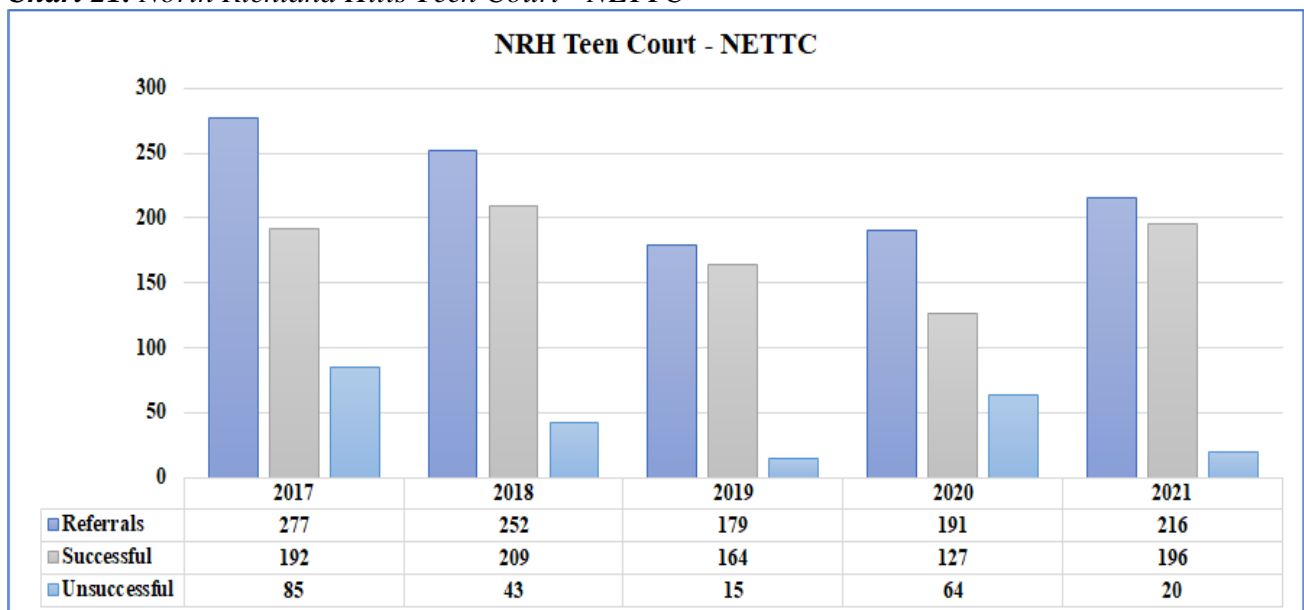


Chart 21 exhibits referrals made to the North Richland Hills Teen Court for the years of 2017 to 2021 and if the referral was successful or unsuccessful.

**Chart 22. Bedford Teen Court - HEB**

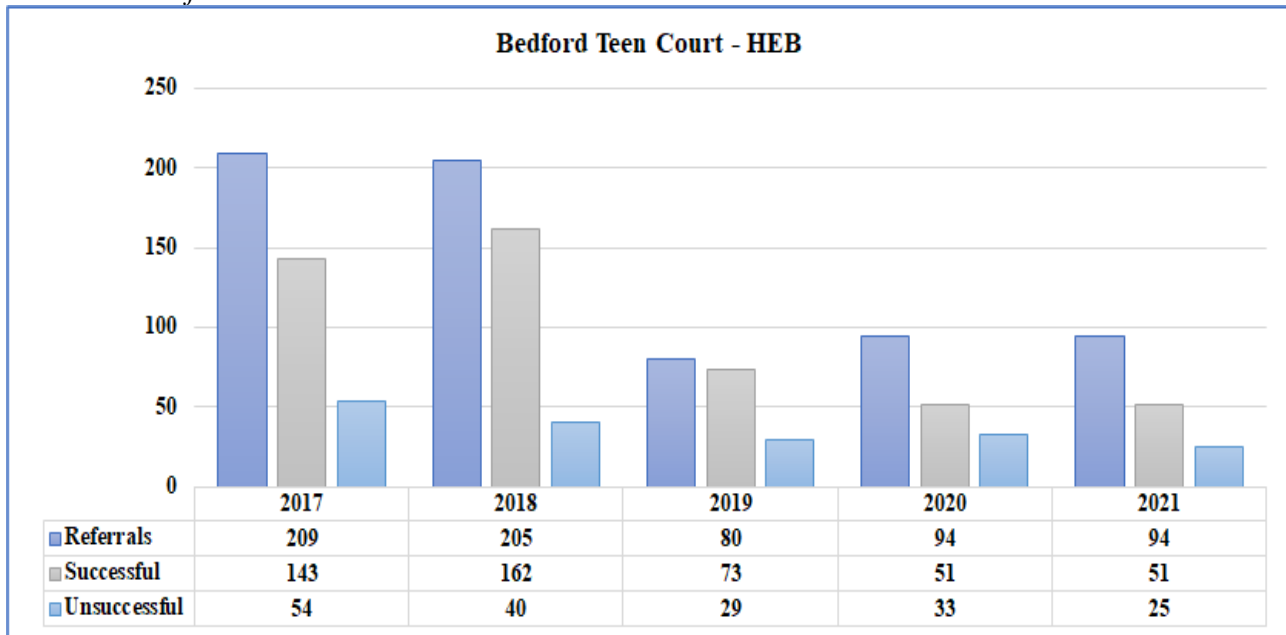


Chart 22 exhibits referrals made to the Bedford Teen Court for the years of 2017 to 2021 and if the referral was successful or unsuccessful.

**Chart 23. Haltom City Teen Court - NETTC**

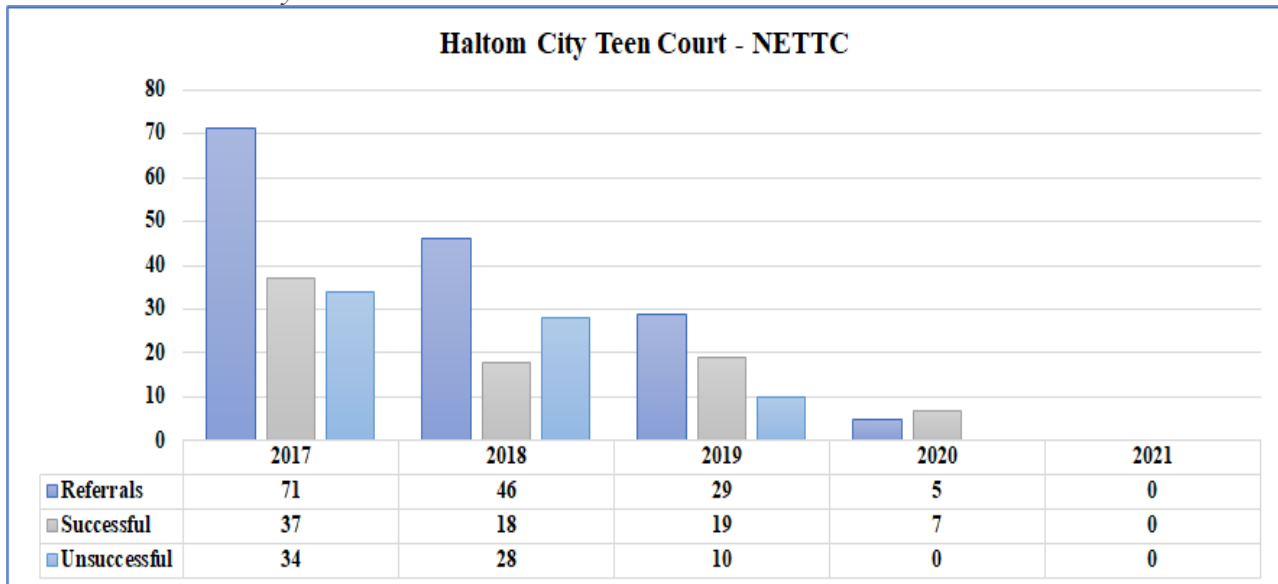


Chart 23 exhibits referrals made to the Haltom City Teen Court for the years of 2017 to 2021 and if the referral was successful or unsuccessful.

**Chart 24. Hurst Teen Court - HEB**

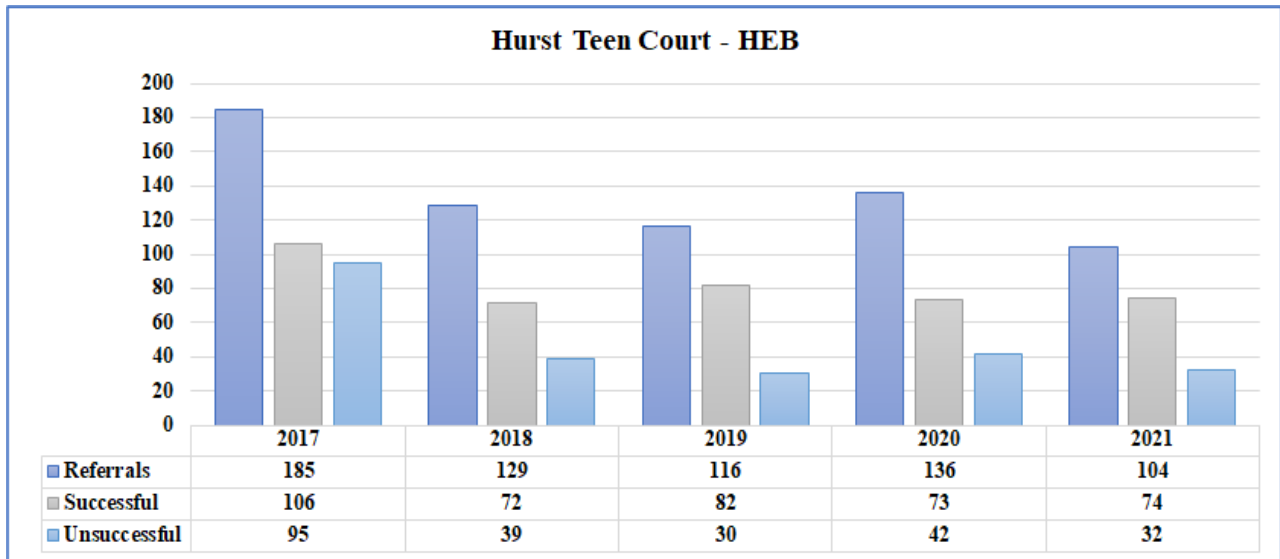


Chart 24 exhibits referrals made to the Hurst Teen Court for the years of 2017 to 2021 and if the referral was successful or unsuccessful.

**Chart 25. Southlake Teen Court - Metroport**

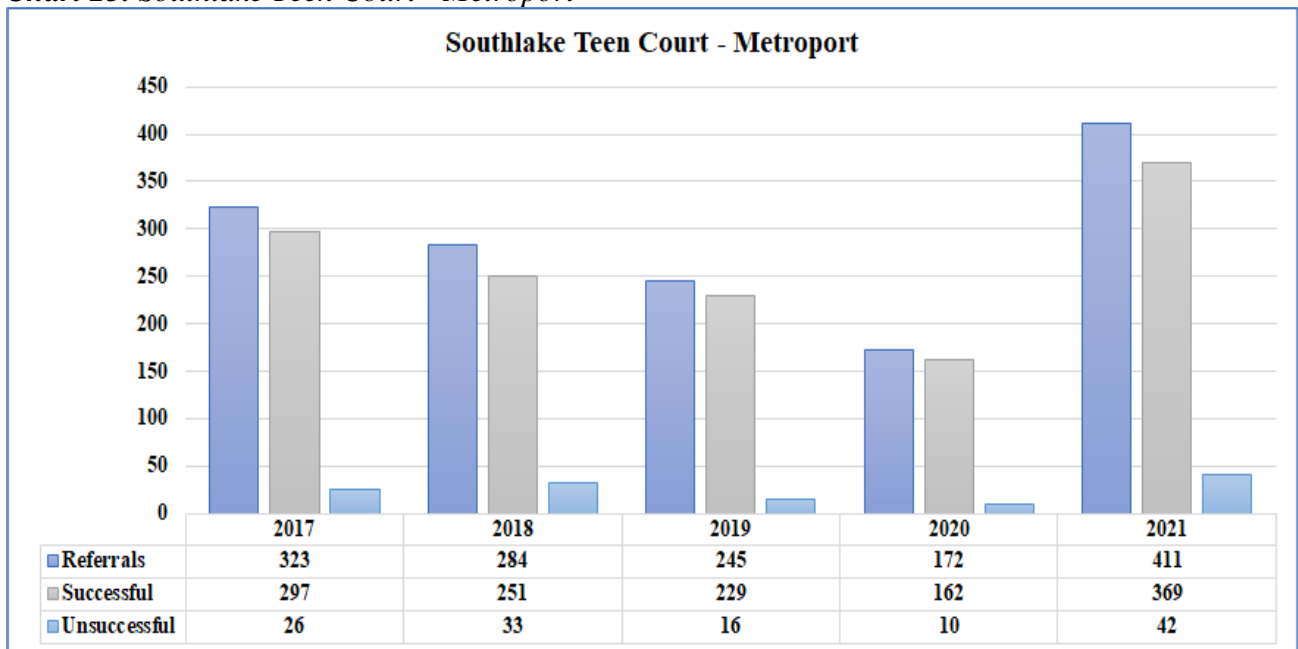


Chart 25 exhibits referrals made to the Southlake Teen Court for the years of 2017 to 2021 and if the referral was successful or unsuccessful.

*Chart 26. Watauga Teen Court - NETTC*

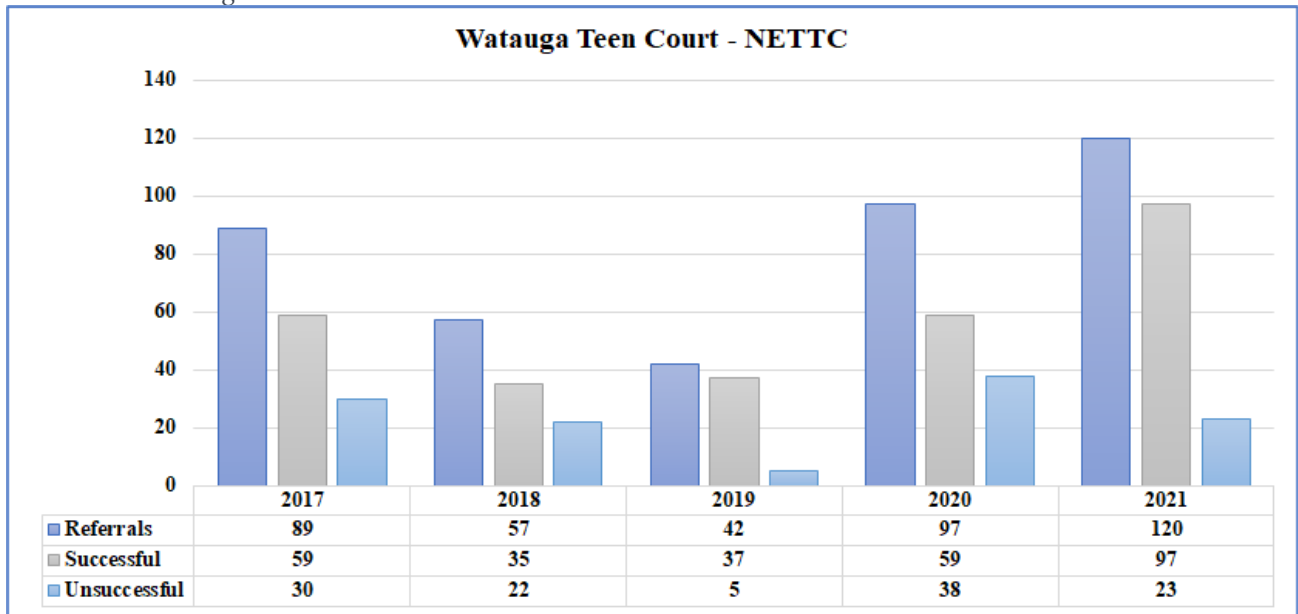


Chart 26 exhibits referrals made to the Watauga Teen Court for the years of 2017 to 2021 and if the referral was successful or unsuccessful.

*Chart 27. Richland Hills Teen Court - NETTC*

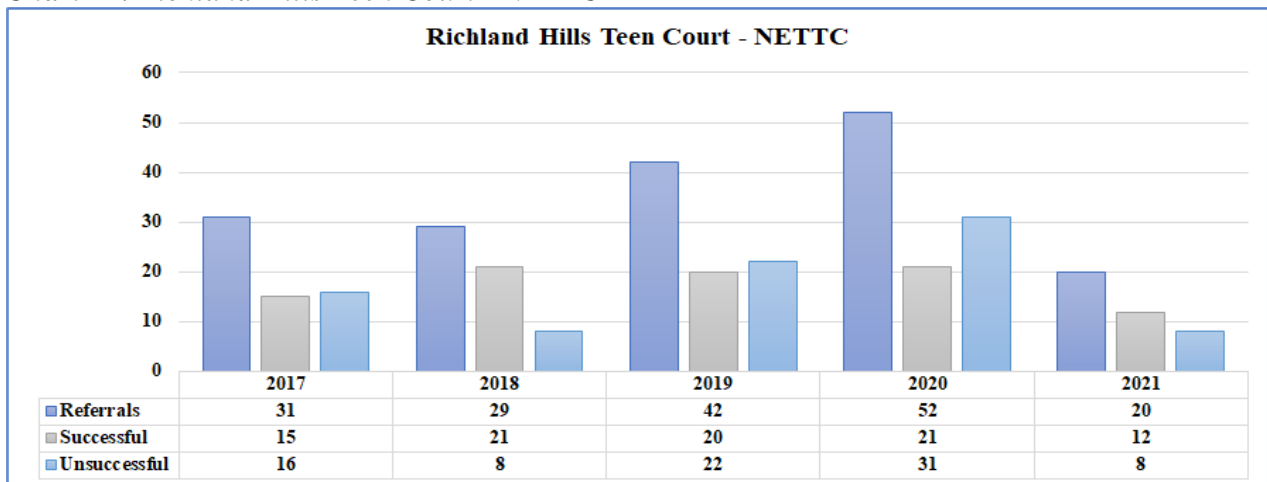


Chart 27 exhibits referrals made to the Richland Hills Teen Court for the years of 2017 to 2021 and if the referral was successful or unsuccessful.

*Limitations*

When compiling data for this project, the team found that some Tarrant County municipalities did not have a teen court. That limited the information available for collection. Reporting was



completed using the data that was available. Time was also an issue. The capstone team felt as though additional data may have been gathered if more time had been available to allot to the human assets for survey responses or public information requests. The capstone team also found that dual requests had to be sent to multiple cities as teen courts would refer us to municipal courts and vice versa. The greatest limitation relates to the limitations to what data can be made available regarding teen criminal statistics. Much of this data is confidential and may not be released by municipalities. When considering recidivism rates, much of the desired information could not be obtained due to these restrictions.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

While teen courts continue to gain popularity and the overall outcomes appear positive, few studies exist on the subject. Questions regarding which models are effective, why, and if there are limitations to the use of teen courts remain unanswered. More importantly, Texas courts currently lack a universal system in which to store a juvenile's court history which makes accurate collection of such data difficult. Though limited, the data collected throughout the course of this project suggests that there is no significant difference in recidivism rates or the outcomes of juveniles who participate in a teen court compared to juveniles who are processed through a traditional court. A review of current literature further supports this evidence, presenting varying results that are inconclusive but nonetheless suggest no substantial differences between the two approaches. The culmination of these findings indicates the need for further research, particularly concerning the areas of teen court models or practices, sanction efficiency and what impact, if any, population size or demographics may have on these factors.

### Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the team makes the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** That a cost-benefit analysis be conducted to determine if restructuring would be appropriate for municipalities in which teens are currently processed through a traditional system.

Incidentally, many of the staff interviewed and surveyed from teen courts report that they do not see many repeat faces in their courtrooms. Therefore, municipalities experiencing high numbers of juvenile offenses without a teen court might consider holding teen court or seeking a different alternative to their current practices.

Future researchers might want to look more closely at the cost of running a teen court in relation to the results of this data. If the research determines that the benefit of a teen court is great in comparison to the money spent on these courts, they can recommend specific changes to the current status quo of their municipalities. Changes to be considered may include the establishment of a youth court, an alternative diversion program, contracting with another court, or improving current procedures for juvenile processing.

**Recommendation 2:** Focus on age-appropriate consequences with an emphasis on education and community service opportunities

Overall, anecdotal information from teen court professionals indicated that the current standard for community service sentencing is fitting for teens. One interviewee described it this way, “You know, we consider the violation a crime against the community. And so, you are making up to the community by performing that community service (Appendix 18).” The hope is that community service will help to increase a juvenile offender’s awareness of civic duty to change his/her future behavior. This is consistent with current literature on restorative justice, a popular model used in teen courts (Fronius, et al 2019).

Additionally, many of the interviews and survey results indicate that court officials believe that education also plays a vital role in juvenile diversion. In some instances, those interviewed were describing defensive driving classes or alcohol and drug abuse courses. However, more than one court official suggested that ongoing instruction in schools for all children regarding the justice system as well as how to be more civically engaged might be helpful.

These types of lessons are already seen across grade levels in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The introduction to the TEKS for US Government says the following, “Throughout social studies in Kindergarten-Grade 12, students build a foundation in history; geography; economics; government; citizenship; culture; science, technology, and society; and social studies skills. The content, as appropriate for the grade level or course, enables students to understand the importance of patriotism, function in a free enterprise society, and appreciate the basic democratic values of our state and nation as referenced in the Texas Education Code.” (2011) Moreover, the Texas Education Agency also requires students in public schools to learn what is called “Social Emotional Learning” in the hope that it will decrease behavior in schools, and aide in their overall learning. In August 2021, a bill was passed by the Texas Legislature that ensures these skills will be taught in public schools. (Elizalde & Elizalde, 2021)

Therefore, as we look to future studies on the state of juvenile citations, researchers should focus their attention on curriculum and pedagogy practiced by the teachers and schools. Each school

district supplies its own curriculum. By researching the curriculums used by the districts and comparing the citation rates among juveniles within the district boundaries, a correlation can be established between the curriculum and the districts with higher or lower citation rates.

**Recommendation 3:** That courts emphasize systemic collaboration with juvenile's primary caretakers, educators, schools, law enforcement, and community leaders.

There currently exists no statewide database of juvenile offenders. This means that the same teen can be seen by multiple courts statewide without the ability of that court to track previous citations, other than a confession from the juvenile. This is one of the reasons that tracking recidivism rates is so difficult. When looking at the data from each court, a researcher cannot determine if the number reflects unique cases. To address this problem, the state should create a database for this purpose. Moreover, a database would allow collaboration between the teen court and any other services available in the community for both the juvenile and his/her primary caretakers.

Future research should focus on identifying states that already follow this model for tracking and aiding juvenile offenders. They can determine a more accurate recidivism rate and use the database to also track successful interventions in relation to recidivism. Currently, some district-based police departments track criminal behavior within schools. (Finn et al., 2005) Therefore, this may be a good starting point in identifying successful juvenile rehabilitation programs.

Though many Tarrant County municipalities have embraced the use of a teen court, there does not appear to be clear data to indicate that utilizing a teen court discourages teen criminal behavior or reduces recidivism rates for teens already involved in the juvenile justice system. The data presented here reflects a wide variety of both methods currently being used to address juvenile criminal behavior and attitudes towards embracing methods that may seem touchy-feely or ahead of their time. Without a statewide database to register juveniles who are having their crimes addressed through teen courts, there will continue to be no way to determine if these alternative methods are having an impact on crime.

The capstone team's recommendation that a cost benefit analysis be conducted to determine if changing to a teen court system is a viable option for large-scale implementation is paramount to beginning that journey towards finding an alternative to traditional crime and punishment methods of addressing juvenile criminal behavior. The additional team recommendations that a focus be on community service and education should naturally flower into the team's final recommendation for a collaborative, wraparound approach to working with these juveniles. Doing these things will allow all of the people involved to address juvenile crime in a manner that educates young people in appropriate behavior and does not continue to perpetuate systems that may benefit from a reboot.

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Blue Mound, Municipal Code § §557.  
Burleson, Municipal Code § CSO#1826-08-2021.  
Colleyville, Municipal Code § O-20-2137.  
Crowley, Municipal Code § 05-2020-397.  
Dalworthington Gardens, Municipal Code § 2022-04.  
Edge Cliff Village, Municipal Code § 414-18.  
Eules, Municipal Code § 2299.  
Everman, Municipal Code § 767.  
Flower Mound, Municipal Code § 17-21.  
Forest Hill, Municipal Code § 2021-12.  
Grapevine, Municipal Code § 2021-063.  
Haltom City, Municipal Code § R-2020-024-03.  
Haslet, Municipal Code § 002-2022.  
Hurst, Municipal Code § 2496.  
Keller, Municipal Code § 2054.  
Kennedale, Texas, Municipal Code § 707.  
Lake Worth, Municipal Code § 2021-01.  
Lakeside, Municipal Code § 418.  
Mansfield, Municipal Code § OR-2235-21.  
Newark, Municipal Code § 341.  
North Richland Hills, Municipal Code § 3731.  
Pantego, Municipal Code § 21-874.  
Reno, Municipal Code § 2019-13.

Richland Hills, Municipal Code § 1440-21.

River Oaks, Municipal Code § 1333-2021.

Saginaw, Municipal Code § 2020-25.

Sansom Park, Municipal Code § 566-20.

Southlake, Municipal Code § 1233.

Trophy Club, Municipal Code § 2021-28.

Watauga, Municipal Code § 2020-040.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Code Abbreviations

Alcoholic Beverage Code .....	ABC
Code of Criminal Procedure .....	CCP
Family Code.....	FC
Health and Safety Code.....	HSC
Penal Code .....	PC
Transportation Code .....	TC

### Appendix 2. Legal Terminology – Texas Municipal Courts Education Center

**Adjudication:** The determination and formal pronouncement of the judgement.

**Appearance:** The formal proceeding in which a defendant submits himself or herself to the jurisdiction of the court. Other than the defendant, only an attorney hired to represent the defendant may appear for the defendant.

**Authority:** That which can bind or influence a court. Examples: case law, legislation, and constitutions.

**Citation:** In a criminal case, written notice to appear issued only by a peace officer. Under certain procedural circumstances, it may be used as the charging instrument in municipal court.

**Code:** A compilation of statutes.

**Complaint:** In municipal court, a sworn allegation charging the accused with commission of an offense.

**Concurrent Jurisdiction:** Indicates that cases may be filed in any of the courts that have authority of the offense.

**Conduct in Need of Supervision:** Juvenile conduct that is a lower grade of penal offense, such as running away. These offenses are filed in juvenile court.

**Custodian of the Records:** Anyone who has charge or custody of property or records. Municipal court clerks are responsible for the care, control, maintenance, and archival of municipal court records.

**Defendant:** The person against whom a civil or criminal action is brought.



**Delinquent Conduct:** Juvenile conduct that generally involves violations of the penal laws punishable by imprisonment or jail. These types of offenses are filed in juvenile court.

**Fine:** The penalty assessed by a judge or a jury upon the conviction of a defendant in a criminal case.

**Guilty:** A plea by which a defendant confesses to the crime with which the defendant is charged, or the verdict by which a defendant is convicted.

**Jurisdiction:** The power given to the court by a constitution or legislative body to hear and decide cases.

**Justice of the Peace Court:** Courts with original jurisdiction in criminal cases where punishment upon conviction may be fine only. Justice courts generally have concurrent jurisdiction with municipal courts.

**Juvenile:** Generally, a person who is at least 10 years of age and under the age of 17.

**Limited Jurisdiction:** Authority to hear only certain types of matters. Municipal courts are courts of limited jurisdiction.

**Magistrate:** A judicial officer whose duty it is to preserve the peace within a certain territorial jurisdiction through all lawful means; to issue all process intended to aid in preventing and suppressing crime; and to cause the arrest of all offenders in order that they may be brought to trial or, after trial, to punishment.

**Minor:** In the Transportation Code, a minor is a person who is younger than 17 years of age. In the Alcoholic Beverage Code, a minor is a person who is under 21 years of age.

**Misdemeanors:** A classification of criminal offense in the Texas Penal Code punishable by incarceration in jail or a fine. County courts, justice courts, and municipal courts generally have jurisdiction over misdemeanors. Municipal courts and justice courts, however, only have jurisdiction over fine-only, Class C misdemeanors.

**Municipal Court of Non-Record:** A municipal court that does not keep a record of its proceedings. The appeal is de novo to the county court.

**Municipal Court of Record:** A municipal court that is required to keep a record of its proceedings. Established either by state legislation or city election.

**Not Guilty Plea:** A plea in which the defendant denies guilt in a criminal case and contests the charge. Defendants are presumed innocent, and guilt must be proved by the prosecution. Consequently, if a defendant refuses to enter any plea, a plea of not guilty may be entered by the judge.

**Ordinance:** The equivalent of a municipal statute, passed by the city council and governing matters not covered by state or federal law.

**Plea:** In criminal cases, there are four possible pleas: guilty, not guilty, nolo contendere (no contest), or the special plea of double jeopardy.

**Public Information:** Information that is written, produced, collected, assembled, or maintained under a law or ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by a governmental body or for the governmental body and the governmental body owns the information or has a right of access to it, pursuant to the Public Information Act (PIA).

**Record:** A document containing data or information of any kind and in any form generated or received by an organization and containing information necessary for the operation of that organization's business.

**Sentence:** Punishment imposed on a defendant that has been found guilty. In municipal court, the amount of the fine and costs ordered to be paid to the State.

**Status Offense:** An action that is prohibited only for minors or children because of their age.

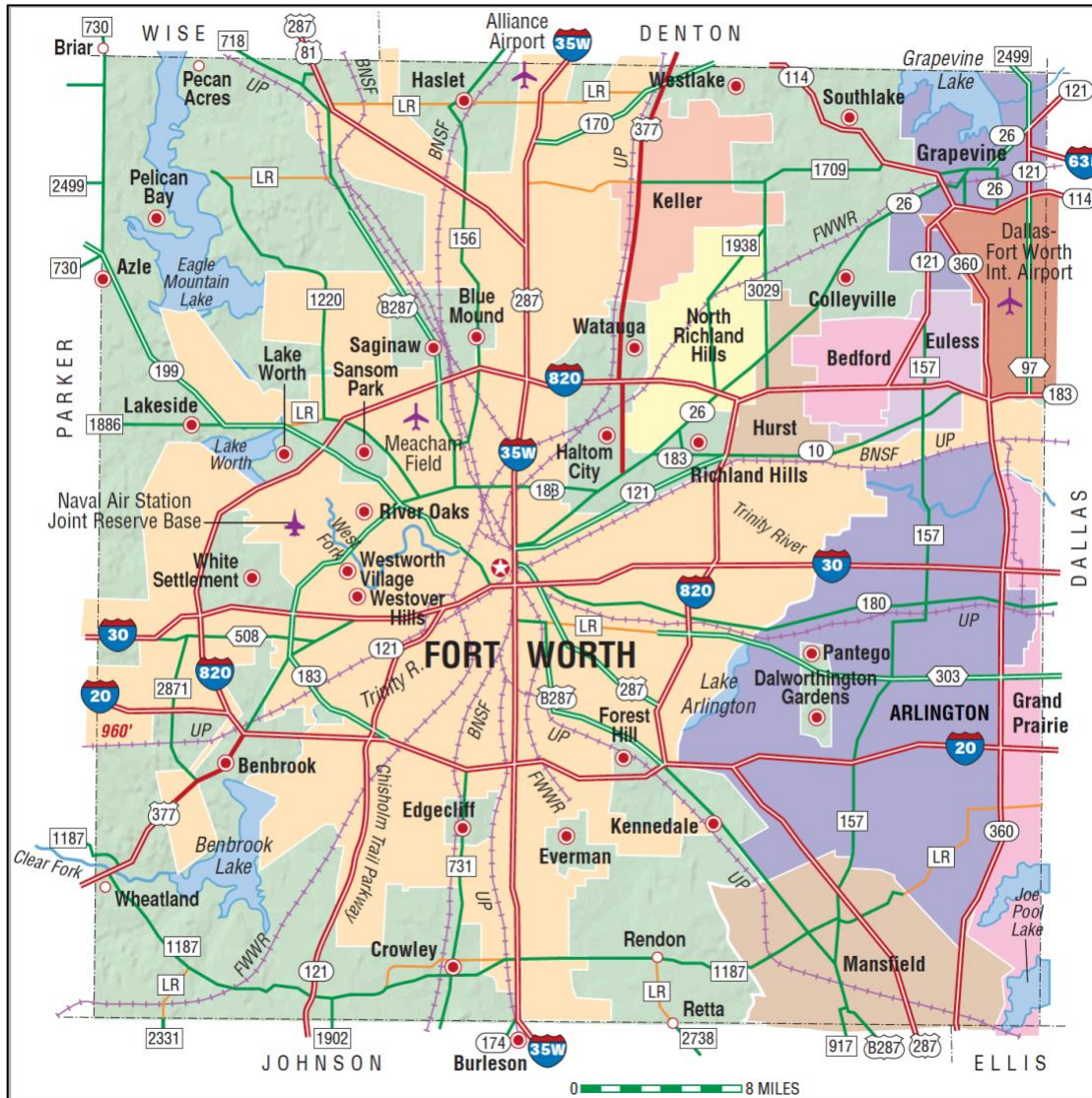
**Statute:** An act of a legislature. Depending upon its context in usage, a statute that may mean a single act of a legislature or a body of acts that are collected and arranged according to a scheme or for a session of a legislature.

**Trial De Novo:** A new trial as if the case had not been previously heard and as if no decision had been previously rendered.

**Truancy:** The unexcused voluntary absence of a child on 10 or more days or parts of days within a six-month period or three or more days or parts of days within a four- week period from a school without the consent of the child's parents. Prior to September 1, 2015, the act of truancy, or failing to attend school, was a crime in Texas punishable by a fine up to \$500. The 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature overhauled the process of juvenile justice for municipal and justice courts, eliminating this criminal offense.

Truancy Courts: Truancy courts are new courts created by the Legislature in 2015 to exercise jurisdiction over cases involving allegations of truant conduct. Municipal and justice courts are designated as truancy courts and may hear civil truancy cases. This is distinct from their authority and jurisdiction as a municipal court.

Appendix 3. Map – Tarrant County



### Appendix 4. Public Information Request

Request Language	Municipalities with Responsive Data	Municipalities with Partial Responsive Data	Municipalities without Responsive Data
<p>For each of the following years: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The number of cases referred to teen court from the municipal court per year</li> <li>2. The number of cases that successfully completed the program per year</li> <li>3. The number of cases that did not complete the program successfully per year</li> </ol>	<p>Bedford Eules Flower Mound Grapevine Haltom City Hurst North Richland Hills Richland Hills Southlake Watauga</p>		<p>Azle Colleyville Keller</p>

<p>For each of the following years: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The total number of citations issued by the police department per year</li> <li>2. The number of citations issued to an adult only (aged 17 and older) by the police department per year</li> <li>3. The total number of citations issued by the police department for curfew violation (excluding any park curfew violations) per year</li> </ol>	<p>Bedford Colleyville Crowley Dalworthington-Gardens Flower Mound Grapevine Haltom City Haslet Lakeside Lake Worth Mansfield Newark North Richland Hills Richland Hills Pantego Saginaw Sansom Park Southlake Trophy Club Watauga White Settlement Westlake</p>	<p>Burleson Eules Forest Hill Westworth Village</p>	<p>Azle Benbrook Blue Mound Edgecliff Village Everman Hurst Keller Kennedale Pelican Bay Reno River Oaks</p>
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### Appendix 5. UTA Municipal Court Survey

A team of students completing the Master of Public Administration degree at UTA are surveying municipalities regarding juvenile crime, the use of teen courts, and what, if any, impact on crime these courts may be having. The project team would appreciate your completing the attached survey by March 21, 2022.

1. What is the name of your municipality?
2. What is your position?
3. Does your municipality utilize a teen court?

3A. If your municipality utilizes a teen court, do you feel it has been effective in reducing teen crime in your municipality?

1. Yes
2. No

3B. If your municipality does not use a teen court, what prevents the use of a teen court?

1. Funding
2. Low volume of citations for teenagers
3. Lack of understanding about teen courts
4. Lack of staff to support a teen court
5. Other

4. Does your municipality utilize a curfew for teenagers?

4A. If your municipality utilizes a curfew for teenagers, do you feel that this curfew has been effective in reducing teen crime in your municipality?

1. Yes
2. No

4B. If your municipality does not utilize a curfew for teenagers, do you feel that a curfew would be helpful in reducing teen crime in your municipality?

1. Yes
2. No

5. In your opinion, what could be implemented in your municipality to reduce teen criminal offenses?

1. Higher fines
2. Parents prosecuted for their child's offenses
3. In-school crime education programs
4. Mandatory public service for offenses
5. Other:

6. What category of offenses are issued against teen courts most often in your community?

1. 1.Traffic violations
2. Status offenses based on age
3. Alcohol/drug offenses
4. Curfew offenses
5. Other

### Appendix 6. Survey Question 1 Responses

What is the name of your municipality?
Azle Municipal Court
Haslet Municipal Court
Haltom City Municipal Court
Bedford
City of Southlake
City of Watauga
City of Euless
City of North Richland Hills
City of Mansfield
Lake Worth Municipal Court
Forest Hill Municipal Court
City of Sansom Park Municipal Court

### Appendix 7. Survey Question 2 Response

What is your position?	
Azle Municipal Court	Court Administrator
Haslet Municipal Court	Court Administrator
Haltom City Municipal Court	Court Supervisor
Bedford	HEB Court Coordinator
City of Southlake	Court Clerk
City of Watauga	Court Administrator
City of Euless	Case Manager
City of North Richland Hills	Court Coordinator
City of Mansfield	Court Administrator
Lake Worth Municipal Court	Court Director
Forest Hill Municipal Court	Court Administrator
City of Sansom Park Municipal Court	Court Administrator

### Appendix 8. Survey Question 3 Response

Does your municipality utilize a teen court?	
Azle Municipal Court	Yes
Haslet Municipal Court	No
Haltom City Municipal Court	Yes

Bedford	Yes
City of Southlake	Yes
City of Watauga	Yes
City of Euless	Yes
City of North Richland Hills	Yes
City of Mansfield	No
Lake Worth Municipal Court	No
Forest Hill Municipal Court	No
City of Sansom Park Municipal Court	No

### Appendix 9. Survey Question 3A Response

If your municipality utilizes a teen court, do you feel it has been effective in reducing teen crime in your municipality?	
Azle Municipal Court	Yes
Haslet Municipal Court	Not Applicable
Haltom City Municipal Court	Yes
Bedford	Yes
City of Southlake	Yes
City of Watauga	Yes
City of Euless	Not Applicable
City of North Richland Hills	Yes
City of Mansfield	Not Applicable
Lake Worth Municipal Court	Not Applicable
Forest Hill Municipal Court	Not Applicable
City of Sansom Park Municipal Court	Not Applicable

### Appendix 10. Survey Question 3B Response

If your municipality does not utilize a teen court, what prevents the use of a teen court?	
Azle Municipal Court	Not Applicable
Haslet Municipal Court	Low Volume of citations for teenagers
Haltom City Municipal Court	Not Applicable
Bedford	Not Applicable
City of Southlake	Not Applicable
City of Watauga	Not Applicable
City of Euless	Not Applicable



City of North Richland Hills	Not Applicable
City of Mansfield	Lack of staff to support teen court
Lake Worth Municipal Court	Low volume of citations for teenagers
Forest Hill Municipal Court	Other: We do not have a teen court, but we do have a juvenile diversion program
City of Sansom Park Municipal Court	Low volume of citations for teenagers

### Appendix 11. Survey Question 4 Response

Does your municipality utilize a curfew for teenagers?	
Azle Municipal Court	No
Haslet Municipal Court	Yes
Haltom City Municipal Court	Yes
Bedford	Yes
City of Southlake	Yes
City of Watauga	Yes
City of Euless	Yes
City of North Richland Hills	Yes
City of Mansfield	Yes
Lake Worth Municipal Court	Yes
Forest Hill Municipal Court	No
City of Sansom Park Municipal Court	Yes

### Appendix 12. Survey Question 4A Response

If your municipality utilizes a curfew for teenagers, do you feel that this curfew has been effective in reducing teen crime in your municipality?	
Azle Municipal Court	Not Applicable
Haslet Municipal Court	No
Haltom City Municipal Court	Yes
Bedford	Yes
City of Southlake	Yes
City of Watauga	Yes
City of Euless	Not Applicable
City of North Richland Hills	Yes
City of Mansfield	Yes
Lake Worth Municipal Court	Yes

Forest Hill Municipal Court	Not Applicable
City of Sansom Park Municipal Court	Yes

### Appendix 13. Survey Question 4B Response

If your municipality does not utilize a curfew for teenagers, do you feel that a curfew would be helpful in reducing teen crime in your municipality?	
Azle Municipal Court	Yes
Haslet Municipal Court	Yes
Haltom City Municipal Court	Not Applicable
Bedford	Not Applicable
City of Southlake	Not Applicable
City of Watauga	Not Applicable
City of Euless	Not Applicable
City of North Richland Hills	Not Applicable
City of Mansfield	Not Applicable
Lake Worth Municipal Court	Not Applicable
Forest Hill Municipal Court	Not Applicable
City of Sansom Park Municipal Court	Not Applicable

### Appendix 14. Survey Question 5 Response

In your opinion, what could be implemented in your municipality to reduce teen criminal offences?	
Azle Municipal Court	In-school crime education programs
Haslet Municipal Court	Mandatory public service for offenses
Haltom City Municipal Court	In-school crime education programs
Bedford	Parents prosecuted for their child's offenses
City of Southlake	Mandatory public service for offenses
City of Watauga	In-school crime education programs
City of Euless	In-school crime education programs
City of North Richland Hills	In-school crime education programs
City of Mansfield	In-school crime education programs
Lake Worth Municipal Court	In-school crime education programs
Forest Hill Municipal Court	Mandatory public service for offenses
City of Sansom Park Municipal Court	Other: We do not have a school district, just an elementary school

### Appendix 15. Survey Question 6 Response

What category of offenses are issued against teen courts most often in your community?	
Azle Municipal Court	Traffic violations
Haslet Municipal Court	Traffic violations
Haltom City Municipal Court	Traffic violations
Bedford	Traffic violations
City of Southlake	Traffic violations
City of Watauga	Other: Traffic, Status offenses based on age, class C misdemeanor drug offenses, and curfew
City of Euless	Traffic violations
City of North Richland Hills	Traffic violations
City of Mansfield	Traffic violations
Lake Worth Municipal Court	Drug/Alcohol offenses
Forest Hill Municipal Court	Curfew offenses
City of Sansom Park Municipal Court	Drug/Alcohol offenses

### Appendix 16. UTA Municipal Court Interview Questions

<b>Saginaw – Beverly Brown – Court Administrator</b>	Responses
If you could please say your name for me again, and what your position is with your teen court.	We don't like. It's we don't. How can I say we have juvenile court, but we don't have any teen court that is. The judge just sees them right in the courtroom. My name is Beverly Brown, and my position is Court Administrator.
How are the goals of working with juveniles different than your typical adult offenders when you're in a courtroom?	Typically, with the adult offender the judge will offer to do like deferred, which they'll pay the plea bargain and do some type of like 90-day deferral to keep it off their record. And sometimes with the juvenile, she'll gear more towards like if they want community service. Now here, I mean, she's still offering to have it deferred or even a driving safety course, right?
How many judges are operating within your city?	Just one. We're a small court. Unfortunately, we only have court twice a

	month, and juveniles only in the juvenile setting, and it's only once a month.
Can you tell me then about how your court might be different from larger cities or along those lines?	Yeah. For instance, North Richland Hills, they have their own teen court. So, they usually ... I don't know if they have it like once a week. I think it's once a week, and they're actually able to interact more with juveniles because what they do is instead of allowing them to pay a fine or anything, they'll allow him to do like a jury duty, and actually go to the teen court. And there'll be that. They'll be jurors and they'll assess like their peers as well getting tickets. So, they're seeing them, you know? Stuff like that. Yeah, of course we don't have the capability of doing that.
What kind of citations do you see most from juveniles?	It's mainly no driver's license and speeding. We do see a lot of drug possession or possession of drug paraphernalia tickets. Minor possession of alcohol and tobacco. But something that caught me by surprise? I don't know. They're just your ordinary notes. I mean once in a while you'll see a theft case.
Are there any other procedural type things you do when it is a juvenile case and not an adult?	Well, I think that mainly would be a question for the judge because like I have ... She does take a little bit more time with them and hear them out, so she usually sets it with the late afternoon. They're usually like the last ones we see. Just so that she can spend more time with them and see what options she can offer them. She won't see them without a parent or anything.
What kinds of factors would lead to you guys introducing a teen court?	On that I'm not quite sure. That would probably be more a judge question.
What do you think works well in reducing recidivism rates for juveniles and lowering the number of citations for juveniles? And what do you think, in your opinion, could	I think that community service or taking a class before coming back. Because they don't really like to take it. A lot of the times having that SRO officer at the campus kind

<p>be improved in terms of those juveniles that fall under that category?</p>	<p>of helps. Sometimes, I guess, seeing them with the suit and the badge kind of intimidates them from committing violations or anything. That kind of helps. It just means having a “School Resource Officer” there on site a couple of hours a day. Just like monitoring the schools and stuff. Sometimes having them there, is helpful ... I think reduces because like I said again, it's intimidating seeing somebody in uniform walk down the hall. And so, you're not going to get your typical fights, you know?</p>
<p>Do you have a curfew for teens in your area? And does that seem to cut help cut down on citations?</p>	<p>Yes, yes.</p>

<p><b>Southlake – Dana Kirkland – Court Clerk</b></p>	<p>Responses</p>
<p>Could just first say your name and your position at what court you work with?</p>	<p>My name is Dana Kirkland, and I am the teen court clerk for officially the city of South Lake. But the metro teen court covers South Lake, Grapevine, Keller, and Colleyville. All four of those municipalities.</p>
<p>How long has this Metro teen court been in operation?</p>	<p>My data shows me that we originated in 1995, and so while we're not the first teen court, we're one of the earliest in the states. Based on my sources, the earliest teen court in Texas opened in 1983 and I believe it was opened in Odessa.</p>
<p>What are the primary goals of your juvenile court, and does it have a mission statement?</p>	<p>You know, I believe it does. Not sure where I have that written down, but, basically, the goal of any court is to change behavior, and so we're looking for kids to take responsibility for their behavior through, you know, service to the community and learning a little bit about the judicial system. And that's effectively what most teen courts do. And so that, certainly, our [goal] is to reduce recidivism</p>

	<p>so that kids are in once, and then they learn their lesson and they don't speed anymore or they don't, you know, get caught drinking underage or that sort of thing. So, it's all about changing behavior.</p>
<p>What difference, if any, have you noticed in the nature and number of juvenile citations since you've been a part of the program? Have you noticed increase? Decrease?</p>	<p>I would say that we've seen a decrease in citations, but that seems to be system wide. And I don't know if it's, you know, because of the pandemic, or if it's, you know, police focusing more on community minded outreach. Or the fact that we're down officers, as are most of the municipalities in the area. There are just you know, job openings for officers, but we've definitely seen a bit of a decrease in say the numbers of kids that we service from year to year.</p>
<p>Is the teen court doing its job and reducing those recidivism rates?</p>	<p>I think so. Our recidivism rate is probably less than 1%. Once in a while, we see a familiar face, and we always look at the upcoming court date to see if we see any familiar name. Then I would let the judge know. But what's tough to track is that a kid could get teen court for a violation in one of our four cities, go through our program, and then get pulled over, say, in Irving or in Dallas, or in Fort Worth. And there's no statewide link to say, hey, that kid just finished teen court. We have to rely on their honesty. And so that kind of recidivism is impossible to track.</p>
<p>What would you say are the most and the least common citations that you guys deal with?</p>	<p>So, we're about 70% traffic related, so speeding, running stoplights, that kind of thing. Then 30% tends to be either curfew or the more serious offenses that we see, like possession of drug paraphernalia or minors in possession or consumption of alcohol. We're seeing an uptick in family violence. Assault. Family violence violations. Very few thefts. Those used to be reported fairly heavily and they're pretty</p>

	<p>rare these days, so I don't know if things are ... And it's just with the employment rate and maybe those sort of secret shopper positions not being filled. And so that's not being reported. I'm not sure what the reason is for that. We don't see as many as we used to. But yeah, that's kind of the gamut.</p>
<p>How does the juvenile court work? How can you describe for me... if I were a teen and I got a citation, what are my next steps? How does it work?</p>	<p>Absolutely. So, on the ticket it gives a phone number of the court for them to call because every teen has to see the judge to make a plea, and that plea can either be guilty, no contest or not guilty. If a teen chooses to plead not guilty, it means they either want to fight the ticket or at least have their day in court. That would start with a separate meeting with the prosecutor to see if they could work out a deal and then possibly go to trial. It's very rare. Guilty and no contest pleas at our level of court essentially mean the same thing. And if a teen is willing to plead guilty, the judge may offer them a driver safety course if it's a moving violation. Or deferred disposition, which is sort of like probation, they pay the full fine and court cost plus any other stipulations the judge hands down, or she will offer them teen court and then explain a little bit about it. If a teen takes teen court, ideally, we have front loaded the courtroom before the judge takes the bench to just explain an overview of the program so that they know what they're getting into. They have a sense, it's OK, it's community service. I have 90 days to finish. It could be this many hours, that kind of thing. So once a teen takes teen court, my assistant and I set up shop and we are ready to receive them and take them through the enrollment process and we tell them all about it. We tell them, you know,</p>

based on your violation, this is the range of community service hours that your jury will sentence you with. We'll schedule their trial date for an upcoming evening, take care of paperwork with a parent, answer all questions, and give them a list of community service locations that we approve of that they can start calling and setting up service. So, the kids get a reminder by email the day before their trial. They show up on Tuesday night for their trial and most nights we hold 10 trials, so they stay on trial and their jury is other teens. There's always an adult monitor in the room that's guiding the process and kind of running the procedure along. But the kids are asked questions by the jury if it's one of our lesser offenses. Then they step out while the jury deliberates. If it's a greater offense, if it's one of those alcohol or theft or drug paraphernalia violations that I told you about, their trial may be handled a little bit differently. They may be handled in our courtroom. The other guest judge, not the regular sentencing Municipal Court judge, but usually a practicing attorney that's filling in as a sort of a guest judge for teen court. I have trained teen attorneys that take positions of defense and prosecution, and they will represent the teen and the defense will be pushing for the minimum hours of community service and the prosecution will be pushing for the maximum. They go at it like real court. It's like watching a movie. And the defendant will go up on the witness stand and answer questions. There's a jury watching, and that jury will deliberate and pass sentence. And those hours might be bigger. And it's a wider range in its higher hours because it's more serious offenses. So, with whatever kind of



	<p>trial, once there's sentence, we do give them a little bit more information and then send them on their way. They sign up through a computer calendar program for their jury terms, which is always part of their sentence. It means they have to come back and sit on other kid's juries. And that's basically how our program recycles itself so that we have enough jurors to pass all these sentences and then the defendant is on ... not really on their own because I'm always gonna send reminders. I'm a retired teacher. I can't give you a 90-day assignment and then leave you alone. I'm sending reminders pretty frequently, but then they have 90 days to complete. And upon completion, the citation is dismissed, and it's kept off their record.</p>
<p>The jury is comprised of teens that have successfully completed the program?</p>	<p>That are still in the program. So, when teens are given a sentence, they're given community service as well as either 2, 3 or four jury terms - more jury terms for the greater offenses. And so those ... most of those kids that are on the juries are those kids that are defendants with injury terms. I do have some kids that volunteer, probably about 55 right now. And I invite 5 per week to volunteer with us. And so, they're doing the same thing that the jurors who have sentenced to do this are doing. They're just helping out and getting volunteer credit.</p>
<p>How does a teen become an attorney for your court?</p>	<p>So, they have to contact me themselves. I get a lot of parents that want to arrange this for their kids, but I insist on teens contacting me. That shows interest and initiative. They're put on a wait list, and they're contacted when we have an attorney training. Now pre pandemic., it used to be probably once every quarter. What I was finding was I had, probably about 75</p>

attorneys on record and it used to just kind of be a free for all. We didn't limit the numbers. Anybody could show up. They'd all signed up for cases. And it was ... I never knew who I was going to get until that night. We have sort of changed things. post pandemic, and I'll talk about that separately. But the kids go through a training process. It is 4 hours long. One of my guest judges is my trainer, and she just sort of gives an overview of teen court. We explain what kids are in there for, what kinds of cases they might see, and then we hold a mock trial. So, we give them lunch and then about an hour to prepare whether they're gonna do defense or prosecution. This last time that we did the training, it was over the summer, we did two different sessions, an afternoon session and the evening session. So, it was twelve kids per session. So, I had to build a program pretty much up from scratch because we lost so many kids from graduation and the pandemic. And they just found other ways to volunteer. So, we trained 24 kids. That seems like the sweet spot. That's a great number to have. Everybody gets a turn. They can take a week off, that sort of thing. But they participate in the mock trial and sort of get their feet wet. I invited actual defendants to serve as their jury to judge the mock trial, and I invited a defendant and persuaded her to be the defendant so we could have a consistent story. And we had some trials and so then, you know, that's their practice. The next time they show up, they're gonna try a case. And now we have it organized a little bit more so that we bought into the sign-up Genius program. And so, when I have the case set for jury trial, which is what we call those trials that are for the more serious offenses

	<p>that the teen attorneys work on. I set that up in signup genius so that the kids know it's alcohol case. You get to choose defense or prosecution, so they know what kind of a case it is. What sides they're going to work on and then in most cases they can see who their teammate is, and a lot of these kids are on connecting apps. You know, they're all on some sort of WhatsApp and they're communicating with each other. And they're sort of coming up with battle plans even before they show up on the Tuesday night at the trial. So, it's a lot more organized now. I know who's coming, and they have more time to prepare, and it allows me on those nights to sit in the courtroom. And I just I script what's happening so that I can offer them feedback.</p>
<p>What works well within the juvenile court system and then are there ways in which you believe it can be improved? So basically, a pros and cons of its current state.</p>	<p>I've already alluded to what I think could be improved. I would love if there was some sort of a statewide link with all the teen courts. If there was a statewide database with kid's names, or violation, or city when they completed so that we could consult that and make sure that we could track recidivism more easily that way.</p>
<p>Why do you think that isn't a thing? Is it a question of those records being sealed? Is it? I mean, why? Why isn't that already a thing?</p>	<p>I mean, it's just different. Municipalities have their own database. But to link that together, I can't imagine the IT nightmare that the state would have to go through to try to link those together. Yeah, I think our separate court data. That would be the issue, but that that's the thing that I think I would love to see change. As far as what's working. I love that we're all in communication. You know, I've got good friends that are coordinators with a lot of the other courts. And once in a while you will call me and say, "Did you have such and such kid in your court?" And I'll look</p>

	<p>and we'll talk, and the kid might have mentioned to her on his enrollment. "Oh yeah. I just finished over at Metro Court," and then we know that we're sharing a defendant. Then we want to make sure that he's not double dipping on the community service and doing it once and having it try to count for two courts. Yeah, that kind of thing. So, I love that. I love the friends that I've made just in in this office with the people I work with as well as everybody on the board. And the surrounding teen courts is just it's neat to know that other people have the same job, but it's very different challenges. All the cities set their stuff up differently. Different. Different types of trials and that sort of thing. So that's fascinating. And what I think works is that, you know, we're empowering kids to take responsibility here. In so many cases, you know, kid gets the ticket, parents write a check. Lessons not learned. And in teen court, kids are, you know, we consider the violation a crime against the community. And so, you are making up to the community by performing that community service. And I think that's probably the most impressive thing, although I do think that you know a lot of the deeper learning happens when these kids serve on the jury terms and they're listening to other kids tell their stories. Just kind of sniffing out, you know, whether they think someone is truthful or not. It's a lot of good learning happens when they're doing that aspect of it as well.</p>
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<b>River Oaks – Belinda Hernandez – Court Administrator</b>	Responses
How long have you been with the court?	I have been with the court going on seventeen (17) years.

<p>Does the City of River Oaks currently have a juvenile court?</p>	<p>Yes and no. We (River Oaks Court of Record) take cases but it's only maybe five (5) cases a month, but we do it all (adults and juveniles) in one courtroom.</p>
<p>Has River Oaks ever had a designated juvenile court, or has it always operated similarly to how it's currently operating?</p>	<p>It's always been how it's currently operating.</p>
<p>Is that just due to the population (of River Oaks) not supporting the need for a separate juvenile court?</p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p>It has been suggested that any cities that do not have a school district are also not likely to have a separate juvenile court system. Have you found that to be true?</p>	<p>I don't know about that. It just depends if the courts accept the cases. It just depends. There are three (3) or four (4) schools here and we (City of River Oaks) just take their tickets. So, they (Juveniles) can take the tickets to another city's court, it just varies on the court and how they run it. So, for instance, Fort Worth is another city so we (River Oaks) can't take those (Fort Worth) cases. That has to be Fort Worth or JP (Justice of the Peace) or another court.</p>
<p>What would you say are the primary goals with the juveniles in court versus the adults?</p>	<p>Well usually with the juveniles, the goals are going to be similar to the adults depending on the moving violations. And another thing too is that the juveniles have the fighting and the language. If the student has had so many tickets here (at River Oaks), for instance, say like over ten (10) or five (5), and they're still doing the same thing, we normally send it to the county- the juvenile county- and they will take care of that.</p>
<p>What would you say are the most common and least common citations that you see?</p>	<p>The most we see is language and lately we've been seeing a lot of tobacco. And then the least common citations would be... curfew. More on the possession of tobacco. That has increased a lot because now that they changed the age to twenty-one (21 years) ... It used to be eighteen (18 years) a year ago. Because of the kids doing the vapes. And back then we didn't</p>

	have that stuff. Well, we did, but it wasn't so common as it is now with these kids.
Would you say that you've noticed a difference over the course of the seventeen (17) years that you've been there in regard to the number of juvenile citations?	Oh yes. I've noticed a difference. Yeah, it's (citations) been increasing a little bit more.
With regard to the court structure and procedures, what are some ways that it varies from the adults?	Well, it depends. With the juveniles, parents have to be here. That's one thing. The adults come by themselves. That's the only difference.
What are some of the consequences typically seen for juvenile offenses?	Okay, so it depends... so for instance, for the tobacco, fighting, or disturbing the class- usually the judge- mostly for the tobacco- they have to take a six (6) to eight (8) hour course that is required. And community service.
Do you think that those work?	Yes, I do think they work. When they do the tobacco class or any kind of class online for the offense that they do- yes.
How often do you feel like you see repeat offenders?	Maybe about twenty... no, ten percent (10%). But you know what's so funny about this- these kids, they don't come take care of their tickets because they think they're not going to get a warrant- and that's true, they can't get a warrant- but what I do, I put a hold on their (state) license. I send a letter to Austin (Texas) so that when they turn eighteen (18) or twenty-one (21) and want to get their (state) license or try to get their (state) license, they have to come back and pay their fines. And they have to come see me.
What do you think works well when working with juveniles and is there anything that you think could be done that might improve outcomes?	I just think that the kids- it just depends on their environment and who they hang out with. If they keep hanging out with the wrong crowd, they're going to keep getting tickets for the same thing or repeating their offense. Now if they start hanging out with a different crowd or getting involved in school activities, I think that will be an

	improvement. Yeah, something in the system. Because all these other kids that are involved in school activities- their grades have to be high. All these other kids that come in- because we ask another thing for a requirement- bring up a copy of your report card. Their grades are low, and you know when you're in athletics or something you have to have your grades high.
At what point would you think that the population of a city would require a separate juvenile court or a juvenile court case manager?	I would think when it's a bigger city... because I believe River Oaks is about seven thousand (7,000) people so I think maybe like over ten thousand (10,000) or higher- I think that's when they need a juvenile coordinator.

<b>Sansom Park – Brittany Gross – Court Administrator</b>	Responses
would you mind stating your name, your title and what court you represent?	My name is Brittany Gross. I'm with the Sansom Park Municipal Court in the city of Sansom Park. I'm the Court Administrator. I have been here nine years.
does Sansom Park have a juvenile court?	We do not have a juvenile court.
Is there a reason that Sansom Park does not have a juvenile court?	We actually don't have a teen court program or a juvenile case manager. We don't have a school district either. I am a one-person court, so I am the only person who works in the court here.
Is there typically a connection between school systems and the juvenile court systems?	Yes... for larger places, yes. Normally they work together, or they have funding for a juvenile case manager.
would you say that it's common for small town or small city courts to not have a juvenile court?	Yes. Most small municipalities are one (1) person to two (2) people establishments. I know the City of Azle- they have two (2) people in their court. Like River Oaks- there are two (2) Court Clerks there, there's a Court Administrator,

	<p>and there's a Deputy Court Clerk. They have a school district there, but I don't think she has a juvenile case program, but I know they do have a lot of juveniles.</p>
<p>how do you handle situations where you do have to transfer or refer a juvenile case?</p>	<p>So, most of the time that's when they get more- what is it- more than one (1) or two (2) convictions- depending on the type of offense- you can transfer them to Juvenile Court. Most of the time, we only have a few encounters with the same person, but it might not be an offense that requires them to go to Juvenile Court. (In that case) we'll keep it (the case) here.</p>
<p>how would a court without a Juvenile Case Manager handle that type of situation?</p>	<p>Since we don't have a juvenile case manager, all of our juveniles are mandatory to go to court. So, they and their parents have to be sentenced to go before the Judge- it's automatic. They can't make any arrangements here at the window, they are not offered to pay online, everything has to go directly through the court. Most of the time he (the Judge) will require them to take a course- whether it be- if it's an alcohol offense, than an alcohol awareness course, if it's a drug offense than a tobacco or drug related class. He (the Judge) will mandate for them to go to community service or to participate in a program that can help them grow as well as pay the fine. All juveniles have to be accompanied if they're under the age of seventeen (17) ... Sixteen (16) and under.</p>
<p>Over the course of the nine (9) years that you have been with the court, have you seen an increase or decrease in the number of juvenile citations or any changes in the way that these citations are handled?</p>	<p>I would say that I only see an increase when there's a party (laugh) and since COVID, I don't see them as often. Or there are a lot of younger people driving now so you'll have a bunch of them who are just</p>



<p>So there hasn't really been any changes in the way that those citations have been handled with the juveniles over the course of those nine years?</p>	<p>driving without driver's licenses. But once they get it (a citation) and the parents find out, then normally I don't see them anymore. Yes, yes, I think I have seen a difference. Nine (9) years ago, things were handled a lot differently. I think that when you allow them to experience community service or classes, they become more aware of their actions which allows them to not make those same mistakes. If I had a juvenile program, I could see where it could really make a difference. I think it also just depends on the parent and the child themselves.</p>
<p>What would you say are the most common and the least common citations that you see?</p>	<p>No driver's license, speeding, and possession of tobacco. Because now they have all those... like... vapes and stuff (laughs). That's pretty much what I see more of.</p>
<p>What do you think would be one the biggest factors that you would consider in developing a juvenile court? In other words, what do you think would be most beneficial to have in that program?</p>	<p>You know, just allowing a relationship with the kids- with the kids and teens, and the juveniles within the community... so that they can become aware. Providing them with awareness and letting them know that they do have someone they can talk to here... and not to feel judged... but to feel like this is a place where they can learn from their mistakes and become better.</p>
<p>Do you think you've seen a difference- or do you feel like there's a difference- between how receptive the kids are to community service and classes versus the adults?</p>	<p>I would say that kids look at you like you're crazy! (laughs) Adults do the same thing! Yes... nobody wants to have to work for anything and nobody wants to be in trouble or to be frowned upon because they're doing community service. It's not cool. (laughs). It's not something that they look forward to, but I think that it's something good for them to have.</p>