

Effectively Using Judges and Lawyers as Community Resources in Your Classroom: A Guide for Teachers

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Youth conform to societal norms as a result of bonds established at school, at home, and in the community. This behavior takes place when **youth have relevant, interactive experiences with caring adults**. Through carefully structured, interactive lessons with the participation of community resource people, like judges and lawyers, the students in your class can be given this opportunity.

Youth assess their own chances of success in society partially by the number of adults they know that have achieved legitimate success.

You can open these avenues by introducing different legal professionals to the students throughout the school-year. To ensure that you build positive community support for the use of outside resource people, be sure that the experience in your class is a positive one for both students and the resource person. Without proper training and preparation, resource people may be unable to empower the audience they intend to help.

When planning your lesson to include a lawyer or judge, ask yourself . . .

- What are the lesson's outcomes?
- What community information is needed?
- Who can best provide this information?
- How can I prepare the person?

You should decide what role you want the lawyer or judge to play in your classroom.

Sometimes this will depend on a prior relationship with the person and familiarity with their abilities and comfort level in the classroom.

- Will this person be a resource to supplement your lesson by adding knowledge and answering questions?
- Will this person teach the lesson?
- Will they be a "guest lecturer?"

If they are serving as a guest lecturer and resource to you in teaching the lesson, it should be clear to everyone that the lawyer or judge is there to participate in the lesson, not to give a speech or lecture or to run the session by themselves. This is often not what professionals expect when they are asked to come into a workshop or class, so be sure to clarify their role and yours. Often, resource

people will be relieved, as they are required only to pull from their professional knowledge and experience and will not be expected to manage a group of young people.

When you have identified the person best suited to enhance your lesson and the role you want them to play, use the guidelines that follow as they apply to your particular needs and situation.

Making Arrangements

Visit or call the lawyer or judge.

- Introduce yourself and give a brief summary of the class, what you are studying, why you want them to participate, and what follow-up activities are planned.

Let the person know:

- Date and time of participation.
- Length of class period.
- Age and approximate grade level of students.
- Lesson objectives, topics you will cover, or questions you want answered. (Give them a copy of the lesson.)
- How you expect them to participate.
- Location of class, parking, and where they should report.
- Any security concerns and/or procedures.

Find out from the lawyer or judge:

- Audio/visual equipment requirements.
- Whether they have handouts they would like to distribute.
- Necessary pre-visit student preparation.

Plan a date for the class/program visit.

- When selecting dates, allow adequate time for the judge or lawyer to plan his or her schedule (two or three weeks in advance is desirable).
- Because the judge or lawyer sets aside time from his or her own schedule, do not postpone a scheduled visit unless absolutely necessary.
- Sometimes, however, the judge or lawyer may have to postpone a visit.

Confirmation:

- To avoid confusion over details or the possibility that the lawyer or judge might forget

arrangements, send a letter or email to the person, thanking him or her for agreeing to participate and clearly spelling out the arrangements you made over the telephone. Include a copy of the lesson. Send a copy to your administrator.

Arrival of Lawyer or Judge and Class Activity

- Inform appropriate staff of the arrival of your guest so the person will be expected and directed to your class.
- A proper introduction of the guest is extremely important. A brief statement concerning the guest's background and expertise helps to prepare the students for the experience and makes the guest aware of the importance of the visit.
- Use interactive strategies. Select a lesson related to the lawyer's or judge's area of expertise. Keep the lesson relevant to the students' lives and avoid jargon.
- The lawyer or judge is not responsible for class management. It is important that the teacher participate in the lesson. This approach models community and adult cooperation. The teacher's presence and participation verifies the importance of the visitor.
- Most lawyers and judges are not trained teachers. It is sometimes necessary for the teacher to give directions to the guest by using appropriate questions or other clues to help the person more effectively communicate the information desired.
- Allow sufficient time for summary and to thank the guest.

Debrief the Visit

- What were the major points made by the judge or lawyer?
- How did the class react to the visitor and the issues presented?
- Do students believe the use of the person helped them learn about the topic?
- Ask students if the judge or lawyer had any particular biases. If the guest is an advocate of a particular viewpoint, it is important to introduce other viewpoints/perspectives in the debriefing discussion.

Follow-up

- Thank-you letters from students and/or teachers really please classroom visitors, help improve student-writing skills, and encourage lawyers and judges to respond to similar requests.
- A thank-you letter to the person's supervisor will be appreciated by both and will also help encourage future visits.
- Consider inviting resource people with different viewpoints to do follow-up visits on the same topic.

Involve the Media

- Consult with your public relations department and consider whether this is an opportunity for positive press for your school and students. The media can help schools demonstrate their commitment to excellence in learning by reporting on community involvement in schools. Visit the PBA Web site: www.pabar.org/lre.asp for some tips to help you to get the media to cover your program.

Things you might want to include in a letter, email or phone call to a lawyer, judge or other outside resource person when making arrangements to visit your class...

- | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Today's date | <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson objectives, topics you will cover, or questions you want answered (Give them a copy of the lesson if applicable) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your (teacher's) name | <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson just completed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your phone number | <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson following lawyer's/judge's visit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Times you can be reached | <input type="checkbox"/> Role of the lawyer/judge, how you expect them to participate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Date and time of visit | <input type="checkbox"/> Materials they should bring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Length of class period | <input type="checkbox"/> Thank them for their involvement and willingness to visit your class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Location of class, parking, and where the resource person should report | <input type="checkbox"/> Let them know how much your students are looking forward to their visit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Any security procedures | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Number, ages and grade level of students | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abilities of students and class description | |