Suggestions for Judges

• If you are interested in initiating a visit to a classroom, contact middle school and high schools in your area or the school you attended if nearby. Your local bar, judges association, or state law related education (LRE) program may also have a program set up through which such visits are coordinated.

• Remember that teachers are often unavailable during the day and can only take phone calls before or after school. Ask the teacher for an alternate number to ease communication.

• Once you have scheduled a visit, make sure you know the age group you will be meeting with and the number of students involved. Ask the teacher about the level of understanding of the justice system the students have. Be prepared to meet students with a wide range of abilities and personalities.

• The teachers or school administrators you will be working with may have suggestions for content that will be particularly applicable and interesting to your audience. You might suggest following one of the lesson plans included in this guidebook if the teacher has no preconceived notion of the content of your visit.

• Make sure you are familiar with any materials that were distributed to the students in preparation for your visit.

• Encourage teachers to solicit questions from students prior to your visit. This will facilitate discussion with the students and allow more introverted students to get involved indirectly.

• Briefly outline your presentation before your visit. You may want to begin the discussion by asking students if any of their parents or relatives are lawyers or judges or if they have ever met a lawyer or a judge. Inquire as to what they think a judge's job is, how they think judges should act, and how one becomes a judge. It might be interesting to see students’ perceptions and expectations of judges.

• Talk to the students about your background, including what you did before you were a judge, how you were selected or elected to serve as a judge, how long you have been a judge and what you like the most/least about being a judge. You may also want to discuss what your job entails and how you make decisions. Remember that in most cases you will be providing students with their first real life exposure to a member of the judiciary.
• Encourage students to ask questions throughout the discussion and praise students who do. This will keep students’ attention by making the discussion livelier and students will be more apt to participate.

• Discuss any terms and vocabulary that the students may not be familiar with. Words and concepts are listed at the beginning of each unit.

• Consider wearing or bringing your judicial robe on your visit. Most students have never seen a judge in official garb and will find it intriguing.

• If possible, invite the students to visit your courtroom either individually or as a class group coordinated by the teacher. Allow the students to experience the view from the bench, sit in the jury box, and peek into limited access areas, such as your chambers or the jury deliberation room.