

## **STUDENTS IMPROVING RACE RELATIONS: STUDENT PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND RESOLUTION OF ISSUES TOGETHER (SPIRIT) [5239]**

Presented by Michelle Gwinn, Safe Schools Coordinator, Center for Safe Schools  
On behalf of Vermont McKinney, Mid-Atlantic Regional Director, United States Department of Justice,  
Community Relations Service

### **Workshop Summary**

The United States Department of Justice, Community Relations Service (CRS) designed the SPIRIT program in 1985 to assist school administrators in gaining insight into student perceptions of racial problems. SPIRIT stands for Student Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together. SPIRIT is available to schools experiencing racial or intergroup tension free of charge.

CRS recognizes the value of student input in solving racial tension in their schools. CRS believes that, as objective outsiders with facilitation skills, they could be helpful organizing and leading discussions among youth to acquire candid perceptions on school racial problems and solutions. CRS applies the principles of mediation, problem solving, and full engagement of the school community, to help improve the racial climate of the schools. SPIRIT brings students, administrators, teachers and parents together to identify issues, develop solutions, and take action on conflicts within their schools.

CRS, in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Interagency Task Force on Civil Tension has conducted 15 SPIRIT programs since May of 2002 in schools across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The schools which conducted SPIRIT programs varied from small, rural districts, to large, urban districts. They all were experiencing racial or intergroup tension. SPIRIT was conducted at the schools to help them get a better understanding of the degree of racial and intergroup tensions, and to empower the students as stakeholders in the climate of their schools.

SPIRIT brings natural student leaders of diverse backgrounds together to discover commonalities and appreciate difference. The SPIRIT model teaches students new and better ways to develop solutions and make decisions. SPIRIT improves communications among diverse student leaders and reduces racial tensions in schools. Spirit helps to improve student/teacher and student/administrator relationships. SPIRIT works to prevent violence and conflict among students in schools with changing demographic populations.

SPIRIT creates new safeguards to prevent future conflict and minimizes tensions. It establishes a proactive model to use for problem solving. SPIRIT: empowers students; builds collaboration; brings diverse groups together; and develops decision-making skills.

This workshop will describe the two-day SPIRIT curriculum, including the school's commitment to meet with the SPIRIT council on its work plan at least monthly. Participants will be able to identify indicators within a school that would demonstrate the need for a SPIRIT program. Finally, participants will experience a modified SPIRIT through role play.

## **Workshop Goals**

The goal of this workshop is to introduce participants to SPIRIT, a program of the United States Department of Justice, Community Relations Service.

## **Workshop Objectives**

1. Understand the components of the DOJ SPIRIT program
2. Identify indicators which would demonstrate the need for a SPIRIT program
3. Experience a modified SPIRIT program through role-play

## **Workshop Activities**

1. 5-minute ice-breaker
2. 25-minute overview of the SPIRIT program
3. 20-minute Day One role play
4. 10-minute compilation of votes and transition to Day Two role play
5. 20-minute Day Two role play
6. 10-minute question and answer period

## **Assessment**

Several indicators of the success of this workshop will be measured. Participants will be given an overview of the program and will then be able to experience the program through role-play. This will give them a clear, hand-on understanding of the steps of the program, and how it would work in their schools. Additionally, participants will be able to ask questions to clarify any part of SPIRIT about which they are unclear. Finally, participants will be asked to complete an evaluation form at the conclusion of the session (see next page.)

## **Resources**

United States Department of Justice, Community Relations Service. (Fall, 2003). "Student Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together (SPIRIT) Program Description, School Preparation and Curriculum."

United States Department of Justice, Community Relations Service. (Fall, 2003). "Student Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together (SPIRIT) Brochure."

### Evaluation Form

Trainer: Michelle Gwinn

Site: Persistently Safe Schools 2005 conference

**Training Topic:** Students Improving Race Relations: Student Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together (SPIRIT)

Please rate the overall training by circling a number for each statement, with a “1” being strongly agree to a “5” being strongly disagree.

I was satisfied with the quality of the workshop.	1	2	3	4	5
I found the training useful to my work.	1	2	3	4	5
I intend to arrange to have a SPIRIT at my school.	1	2	3	4	5
The presenter had adequate knowledge of the topics covered.	1	2	3	4	5
The presentation of the material was understandable.	1	2	3	4	5
My questions/needs were addressed.	1	2	3	4	5
The opportunity to role-play a SPIRIT was helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
The handouts provided were helpful.	1	2	3	4	5

**Comments:**

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