

## SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS IN CLASSROOMS: AN APPLICATION OF BEST-PRACTICES IN LAW-RELATED EDUCATION

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### Session Overview

#### Abstract

School Resource and community police officers can provide outstanding learning opportunities for K-12 youth when teachers and officers work together to plan and implement best-practices in law-related education. Over the last five years through their *Youth for Justice* project, Street Law, Inc. and Constitutional Rights Foundation (CRF) have teamed up to provide national trainings for School Resource Officers (SROs) and community police officers. Funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and recently the Hamilton Fish Institute, this unique seminar provides officers with curriculum materials and instructional strategies specifically designed for officers to engage young people in learning about the law, law enforcement, and the rights and responsibilities of effective citizenship.

#### Summary

According to research in the fields of civic and law-related education, having legal and law enforcement professionals co-teach with classroom teachers can have positive impacts on students. Students gain content knowledge about the law, legal system, and democratic principles from the professionals who apply this knowledge in their work, thus providing students with “real world” applications they can understand and appreciate. Students’ skills related to critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, and discussion can also be reinforced when the students have opportunities to engage interactively with the outside resource person. Further, students’ dispositions about authority, respect/appreciation for the legal system, and belief that there are caring adults in the community can be increased when teachers and officers work together *effectively*.

The key is implementing *effective* practices. Research demonstrates that the type of interaction legal and law enforcement professionals have with students makes a difference in terms of increasing or decreasing students’ positive dispositions, particularly in the case of police officers. Three key best-practices are:

- Teachers and officers need to pre-plan the lesson, identifying which parts of the lesson each will take and capitalizing on the **special expertise** the officer brings in law, police procedures, and more.
- Teachers, **not officers**, should handle classroom management. Officers need to be allowed to be seen as “coach” and “mentor” by the students, not disciplinarian.
- The lesson plan should provide **interactive methods** for students to engage with the officers and with each other. Studies have shown that when outside resource people, particularly those with an authoritarian position in the community, lecture *to* students instead of talk *with* them, it can adversely impact students’ dispositions.

To help SROs and community police officers effectively implement best-practices in civic and law-related education, Street Law, Inc. and Constitutional Rights Foundation provide special seminars and curriculum materials for officers and educators.

In this session, we will provide a rationale for encouraging teachers and officers to work together in classroom instruction; provide an overview of the special training provided to officers; discuss specific examples of lessons and classroom activities that promote best practices in civic and law-related education; and share success stories from the trainings and the field. Participants will be provided with curriculum materials to share with officers and teachers.

## **Workshop Goals**

Participants will be introduced to Law-Related Education and the role that School Resource Officers and community police can play in educating young people about the law and legal system and in having a positive impact on students' civic skills and dispositions.

## **Workshop Objectives**

1. To introduce and define Law-Related Education (LRE) and provide a brief overview of best-practices associated with LRE and civic education.
2. To provide an overview of key elements in preparing officers to co-teach in classrooms, including examples of specific "tried and true" lessons officers successfully use with students.
3. To provide opportunities for participants to discuss and share successes and challenges of officers teaching in classrooms, as well as ask questions of the presenters.

## **Workshop Activities**

1. 5-minute introductions: Presenters and participants
2. 15-minute overview and rationale for LRE and involving SROs/community police officers in teaching students
3. 20-minute interactive, hands-on demonstration of part of a lesson from Street Law, Inc. curricula for SROs
4. 15-minute overview of how Street Law and Constitutional Rights Foundation design/deliver special trainings for police officers and educators
5. 10-minute discussion and question/answer. Distribute sample curriculum and resources to participants

## **Assessment**

Indicators of success for this workshop include:

1. Participants will demonstrate an understanding of the basic rationale for LRE and involving law enforcement officials in teaching youth about the law.
2. Participants will demonstrate a high level of engagement and active participation in the session through the lesson demonstration, discussion, and question/answer activities.
3. Participants will provide satisfactory ratings of this session on their conference evaluations.

## Resources

Street Law, Inc.: <http://streetlaw.org/sros>

Constitutional Rights Foundation: <http://crf-usa.org>

American Bar Association *Technical Assistance Bulletin No. 21*: “Police officers and Law-Related Education: Building a Winning Strategy for Youth Education Programs” <http://www.abanet.org/publiced/tab21.pdf>

CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) and Carnegie Corporation of New York. (2003). (2003). *The Civic Mission of Schools*. New York: Author. Available <http://cms-ca.org/CivicMissionofSchools.pdf>

Kirlin, M. (2005). *Promising Approaches for Strengthening Civic Education*. CA: California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools. Available <http://cms-ca.org/CMS%20white%20paper%20final.pdf>