



“We often talk about teaching the whole child. Youth Court moves from punitive sanctions to accountability and skill development.

Through restorative justice principles, the respondent is held accountable, connected with the community, and provided an alternative to suspension.

As a school administrator, it is wonderful to see youth in action involved and empowered to make a difference in their school and community.”

*- Brian Hardcastle,
Assistant Principal
River Ridge High
School
Lacey WA*

Interested in Youth Courts? What *School Administrators* Need to Know

A youth court is a program in which youth volunteers sentence their peers under restorative justice principles for school rule violations, truancy, juvenile offenses, or traffic infractions. There are over 25 youth courts operating throughout Washington State and many more are being planned. How could your school benefit from a youth court program? As a school administrator, here are a few things to consider as you think about starting a program in your school.

Benefits for School Administrators

The benefits of youth court reach far beyond the individual student, creating a positive return for school administration as well.

Youth Courts can help school administrators by

- reducing the number of school rule violations handled in the traditional school discipline system,
- introducing new approaches to challenging problems of truancy and other school rule violations,
- improving the relationship between youth and school administration by giving students an active role in matters of school discipline,
- increasing student morale and sense of belonging to the school community, and
- helping schools meet their goals of providing authentic learning experiences that teach citizenship and life skills.

A Constructive Tool for School Discipline

Every school administrator is charged with the challenge of developing a disciplinary process that effectively addresses and ultimately minimizes the violation of school rules. Youth court members mature through the process and youth rule violators are encouraged through positive peer pressure to comply with the rules.

Youth courts also benefit students by

- creating better school citizens by educating youth about justice,
- strengthening students' sense of community by providing an authentic opportunity to participate in the system,
- re-connecting school rule violators to their school community by using restorative justice principles,
- improving students' self-esteem by providing valuable skills and training, and
- exposing students to career opportunities in law-related fields.

An effective youth court program creates an environment that discourages school rule violations by promoting the concepts of community and responsibility. In addition, youth court programs reduce recidivism by not simply punishing students but giving them the opportunity to rejoin the community through the restorative justice process.

Typical school rule violation cases include disrupting class, food fights, school parking violations, interfering with the operation of a school bus, dress code violations, using vulgar language, using a computer inappropriately, and other nonviolent, nonsexual violations.

(over)



Want to create a youth court but don't know where to start?

Help is here! Start with contacting the **Washington State Council on Public Legal Education** for information and technical assistance.

Visit the **Federal Youth Court Program**, www.youthcourt.net, which has helpful publications, training materials and resources to assist emerging youth court programs, including these **important publications**.

- *Youth Cases for Youth Courts Desktop Guide*
- *Peer Justice and Youth Empowerment: An Implementation Guide for Teen Court Programs*
- *National Youth Court Guidelines*

The Role of School Administrators

The active and enthusiastic involvement of school administrators is vital to the success of a school-based youth court program. The roles of school administrators in youth court programs vary depending on the type of youth court program and how it is structured.

School Administrators can

- be the catalyst for starting a school based youth court program,
- refer students to youth court, and
- serve as the liaison between youth court program and district administration.

Steps to take

Whatever their role, active participation from school administrators is a key component in a successful program. Here are some steps you can take right now to begin the creation of a youth court in your school.

- Participate in an exploratory group to identify youth problems in your school and community and where there is a need for effective programs.
- Contact the Washington State Council for Public Legal Education (cple@wsba.org) for information and technical assistance in starting and operating a youth court.
- Consult the Federal Youth Court Program at www.youthcourt.net.
- Contact other communities in Washington that have a youth court program in place.
- Participate in an advisory group to set up a program.
- Authorize school administrators to refer cases to the youth court.

For more information on youth court programs and training opportunities in Washington State, contact

The Council on Public Legal Education

c/o Washington State Bar Association

1325 4th Avenue, Suite 600

Seattle, WA 98101-2539

Telephone: 206-727-8226

e-mail: cple@wsba.org ★ www.plecouncil.org