

Court In The Classroom

Real Life Hearings

Students experience the real life consequences of decision making and what happens in the legal system

Educational Opportunity

Students get to ask questions of the Judge and other courtroom personnel

A Bit Of History...

In February of 2014, the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court began a new outreach program for students across the county. Instead of busing students to the Justice Center, we took the Court to them. With the help of the Lakewood City Schools, we conducted actual Court hearings before the 8th grade classes of Garfield and Harding Middle Schools. The kids got to see a sentencing for a non-violent crime and witnessed a plea change that showcased how a person's constitutional rights are protected.

Based on what we learned from the trial sessions (pun intended), the program quickly expanded to middle schools across Cuyahoga County. We have visited numerous towns, including Cleveland, East Cleveland, Westlake, Maple Heights, Rocky River, Shaker Heights and Garfield Heights. We are always looking for new schools to visit as well!

"I DIDN'T REALIZE THE COURT DID SO MUCH TO HELP PEOPLE. I THOUGHT IT WAS ALL ABOUT GOING TO JAIL" - STUDENT



The very first Court In The Classroom at Lakewood's Garfield Middle School in February 2014

How Does It Work?

We create a courtroom in a school's auditorium, gymnasium or cafeteria. The Judge has a table in the center while the defense and prosecuting attorneys have tables to either side. We hold the sessions on Friday mornings during the school year.

The Judge brings two cases (usually a plea change, sentencing or a probation violation) that would resonate with a group of 8th graders. Previous cases have involved drug possession, sexting, minor assault and attempted burglary. The Judge holds the hearing just as they would in their courtroom with prosecutors and defense attorneys presenting their cases.

We also have two Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Deputies on hand, along with the Judge's bailiff, probation officers and a licensed Court Reporter.



Why Do We Do It?

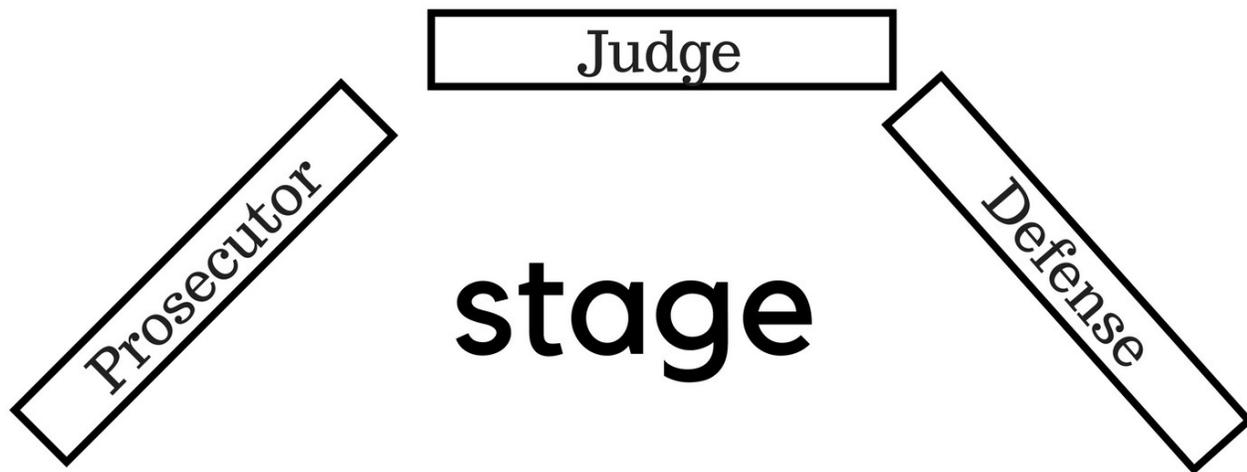
The goal is to provide kids with a firsthand look at the legal process in real time. They see the consequences that poor choices can make on their lives. Often they get to hear from the offenders about what landed them in front of the Court. Some of these statements have been extremely powerful.

And rest assured, we do not bring cases where a defendant will be sent to prison or is currently in custody. While the we hear are felonies, they are low level and will result, most times, in community control sanctions (probation).

Parents can also be notified of the proceedings by the school in advance in case they do not want their child to attend.

It is amazing to watch the kids as the cases play out. They have been attentive and full of questions. The legal system at work truly is fascinating!

Court In The Classroom Setup



Students



We will need three microphones.
One at each table.



Things To Consider

- * We begin scheduling sessions at the start of the school year and hold Court In The Classroom on every other Friday.

- * Schedule two periods at the start of a Friday school day. We generally run from 8:30AM to 10:00AM.

- * We try to schedule one plea change and one sentencing. We look for cases that could directly impact 8th graders. Note: Due to the legal process, changes could be made!

- * We request a separate seating area for defendants/attorneys, preferably a small room. We prefer they not be seated with the students.

- * We can provide a "Courts In Ohio" handout a few weeks ahead of time so teachers can work it into their curriculum. We also provide a link to "Called To Serve", our jury introduction video, and our four-part "Welcome To The Courts" series.

- * The Judge begins by speaking briefly to the kids about the fact that they are now in a court of law and the rules for decorum. He/she will then don the robe and proceed to the hearings.

- * We have the school principal choose a deserving student to call the court into session.

- * When a hearing is completed, we will have one of the sheriff's deputies escort the defendant out of the building. This way we can be assured that they leave properly.

- * If possible, try to have a wireless mic. Many Judges like to walk among the kids as they speak to them.

- * We find that it's best during the Q&A that the Principal select from the students who are raising their hands to ask questions. They know the students and which ones will ask good, serious questions