



# Project Legal

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

### *Content*

- legal system
- constitutional law
- case-study methodology
- problem-solving skills
- critical thinking skills
- use of technology to enhance instruction

**P**roject Legal is a law-related education program for those grades that include U.S. history (most often 5, 8, and 11). It focuses on extending teachers' knowledge of the constitutional basis of the legal system and use of problem-solving and the case-study instructional methodology. The cases that students analyze are drawn from significant Supreme Court cases of interest to adolescents. Recognizing that more traditional teaching approaches have failed to improve students' knowledge of the U.S. legal/judicial system, Project Legal provides teacher training, design a more systematic approach to law and civic education, and increase students' problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

**T**he program provides teacher training, curriculum, internet-based instructional materials, and student assessments to support the implementation of developmentally appropriate case-study learning experiences. The program is structured around two key components. First is an introductory unit of ten lessons to develop students' knowledge about (1) how the law relates to them and (2) the concept of legal values conflicts. The second component is biweekly lessons that are incorporated into existing social studies curriculum to reinforce and extend problem-solving skills and legal knowledge.

### *Context*

- wide range of states, districts, and schools
- diverse ability levels
- urban, suburban, and rural schools

## PROGRAM CONTEXT

**P**roject Legal is currently used in more than 1,000 schools in 33 states with students of all ability levels, including special education and gifted students. Urban, suburban, and rural schools have implemented the program with similar success.

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



The staff development component of Project Legal consists of a minimum of a one- to three-day initial training session that immerses teachers in case-study, problem-solving situations in which they are the learners applying the strategies and techniques they are learning. Teachers not only engage in the learning strategies, but also develop approaches for infusing the new strategies into their classrooms by developing lessons and units to take back to their schools and share with their colleagues. Attention to transferring the learning from the workshop setting to the classroom facilitates teachers' use of the new instructional strategies and builds their confidence to do so.

### *Process*

- training
- demonstration
- electronic and phone support
- simulations

The goals of Project Legal that directly impact classroom practices and student achievement are to improve curriculum related to the U.S. Constitution and legal conflicts, strengthen and increase the use of problem-solving and critical thinking strategies, and use case-study instructional strategies.

The goals of the teacher workshop are to: advance teachers' knowledge of law and critical thinking skills; update teachers on landmark U.S. Supreme Court decisions; teach the case-study method of instruction; coordinate K-12 education; and share resources related to new social studies content standards and instructional methods. Participants have ongoing support via telephone and internet consultation with the Project Legal staff and other social studies teachers who are implementing the program.

### *Intended Audience*

- individual volunteer teachers
- entire department or team

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Students in Project Legal classrooms in grades 5, 8, and 11 significantly improved their knowledge and comprehension of law-related curriculum and their problem-solving skills related to functioning in the U.S. legal/judicial system when compared to students in traditional U.S. history classrooms.



## EVIDENCE OF INCREASED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT



### *Success Indicators*

- criterion-referenced tests of knowledge and comprehension of legal issues and problem-solving skills related to legal issues



Project Legal's first evaluation was conducted during the 1978-1979 school year, and subsequent evaluations have supported the initial findings. The original study (1979) and subsequent ones (1982 and 1995) used a pre- and post-test control and treatment group design. Students who participated in Project Legal classrooms performed significantly better than those who had more traditional social studies curriculum and instruction.

Criterion-referenced assessments of students' law-related knowledge and comprehension (KCL) and problem-solving skills in law (PSL) were designed by the program developers to measure the program's effectiveness. The original study involved 1,718 students in New York state in diverse school settings whose teachers were randomly assigned to implement either Project Legal or traditional instructional approaches. The random assignment of teachers and classrooms to treatment and control groups strengthens the findings of the program evaluation. A more recent study involved three geographically diverse settings (NJ, OK, NY). As in the previous studies, fifth-, eighth-, and eleventh-graders in Project Legal classrooms scored significantly better ( $p < .01$ ) in knowledge and comprehension of legal issues and in problem-solving related to legal issues.

### THE BOTTOM LINE



This social studies program involves students in case-based constitutional law that engages them because the issues are relevant to adolescents. It integrates the use of technology into the curriculum to enhance students' learning. Students who have engaged in Project Legal have demonstrated increased understanding of the U.S. Constitution and critical thinking. The staff development component helps teachers identify cases for discussion, strengthens their understanding of constitutional law, and develops their ability to use case-study, problem-based instructional strategies.

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## DOCUMENTATION

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