



Walking in their Shoes: Teachers explore the administration of justice

Florida teachers explored the judicial branch with state Supreme Court justices as their instructors in April as part of the 2007 Justice Teaching Institute. Twenty five secondary teachers from 19 of Florida's 20 judicial circuits experienced the appellate process using the case of *Jenkins v. State of Florida* (SC06-839). The institute immersed teachers in a hands-on examination of the administration of justice while providing a human dimension to the process. All seven of Florida's Supreme Court justices served as faculty during the institute.



A panel of teachers practice the role of judges in an oral argument simulation.

"This is the best learning experience I have ever had in my 31 years as a teacher," commented Roy Allen of Sebring High School. Teacher Greg Newburn from Newberry High School in Gainesville agreed. Newburn, a lawyer now teaching at Newberry Criminal Justice Academy, stated, "It was an amazing, unforgettable experience... Pound for pound, this institute offers a better introduction to legal principles than law school."

The agenda provided a unique balance of academic and clinical experiences. Teachers took a real case from the streets to the courts in a whirlwind trip through the justice system. Judge Janet Ferris of the second judicial circuit and Judge Kevin Emas of the eleventh judicial circuit served as mentors throughout the institute. Beginning on the streets, teachers participated in a simulated search with Tallahassee Police Department detectives. Teachers learned about searches and seizures from the police perspective and explored the meaning and application of Florida's strip search statute.

Teachers then explored the trial courts with Public Defender Nancy Daniels in a mock motion to suppress hearing. Tonya Sevalia, a middle school teacher from Broward County, felt the hearing was instrumental in helping see the connection between the trial and appellate courts. Using the scenario from the *Jenkins* case, teachers built upon their knowledge of the Fourth Amendment to connect the legal and constitutional issues before the court.

Teachers participated in sessions addressing legal research, alternative dispute resolution, the structure and function of the courts, and preparing for oral arguments. Teachers prepared as lawyers and justices to re-enact a mock oral argument in the *Jenkins* case. Ultimately, the teachers also observed the real oral arguments at the Florida Supreme Court.

Lesson extensions were provided by Annette Boyd Pitts, Executive Director of the Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. Teachers explored case studies, strategies for addressing controversial issues, and a host

of law-related resources to use in the classroom.

In a very practical classroom exercise, Justice Barbara Pariente and Annette Pitts demonstrated how to do a case study and Supreme Court conference activity using virtually any case. “All presentations were amazing but the case study exercise is something I can use immediately when I return to the classroom,” commented many of the teachers.

Justice Quince and Justice Cantero provided coaching sessions to assist teachers in preparing for oral argument. Justice Wells addressed the structure and function of the Florida courts with teachers, while Justice Bell and Sharon Press led a session on alternative dispute resolution procedures. A session on judicial independence was conducted by Justice Harry Anstead. “I felt completely enlightened and rejuvenated – spending so much quality time with the justices was the most amazing thing!” reports a high school teacher participant.

Justice R. Fred Lewis spearheaded the institute and addressed the participants throughout the four and a half day program, including a substantive review of the Fourth Amendment and its applicability to the Jenkins case. “In serving as a justice for a day,” one teacher reported, “I was able to see how different judges are from legislators or other elected officials.” Another teacher responded, “When I had to interpret what a Florida Statute meant, I could better understand the difficulty judges have in trying to determine the meaning of such principled concepts such as ‘reasonable’.”

Funding for the institute was provided by the Florida Bar Foundation.

Evaluations confirmed increases in teacher knowledge as well as trust and confidence in the courts. Teachers only requested one extra day to help absorb more content. A high school teacher summed up the program by saying, “The institute is Pareto Optimal – don’t change a single thing.”

Teacher Participants

Roy Allen

Sebring High School

Kenneth Anderson

Avalon Middle School

Mary Angelo

Falcon Cove Middle School

Charles Bullard

Wewahitchka High School

Judy Cashwell

A. P. Leto High School

Terri Demmon

Southwest Middle School

Marlon Francis

Smart High School

Lisa Hanser

BAK Middle School of the Arts

Allan Harrison

Fernandina Beach Middle School

Dwayne Jefferson

Jefferson County High School

Sharonda Johnson

Ft. Pierce Central High School

Jo Ann Kerpchar

Booker Middle School

Patti Krueger

DeLaura Middle School

Anita LaPlant

Gulf Coast Academy of Science and Technology

Joseph Manento

Gulf Coast High School

Jennifer Martinez

Berkeley Preparatory School

Dana Murphy

New Smyrna Beach Middle School

Greg Newburn

Newberry High School

Thomas Ross

Pinellas Park High School

Rhonda Royston

Buchholz High School

Emily Sanders

Jose Marti Middle School

Tonya Sevalia

William Dandy Middle School

Melissa Sirin

Miramar High School

Rhonda Southerland

Fort White High School

Cynthia Wright-Sheppy

Jones High School