

From the Courtroom to the Classroom: Lawyers Return to Teaching in Law Magnet and Academy Programs in Florida High Schools

From Pensacola to Miami, Florida students are exploring the legal system, the courts and the Constitution on high school campuses and in many cases in their own courtrooms. Law-related theme-based schools provide a unique experience for students attracted to the study of law or law related careers. Tracks may include academic and technical school approaches. While middle school civics classes have taken the headlines in Florida since the passage of legislation in 2006, law magnets and academies continue to attract high school students with a career interest in law. The Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. (FLREA) has played a key



Pensacola High School student participating in a mock legislative hearing at the Florida House of Representatives.

role in the advancement of high school law studies programs in Florida since its development with the assistance of the Florida Bar Foundation and The Florida Bar twenty five years ago. FLREA has assisted in the development of law elective courses offered through the Florida Department of Education Course Code Directory. While many schools offer law electives, law magnets and academies provide a curriculum embedded in the law offering a unique experience for students with an interest in law related careers. Today, even middle school law

academies and programs are beginning to develop.



On-campus courtroom at Fort Lauderdale High School.

High schools in Pensacola, Jacksonville, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach, Pinellas Park, Orlando, Port Orange and other cities across the state offer high school law magnet and academy programs with a content emphasis in the law. Many of these programs have courtrooms on campus providing real life laboratories for learning. Law magnets and law academies today offer a wide range of law elective classes. Often attorneys are hired as full time teachers to serve as faculty in these innovative programs. FLREA has also designed a Law Honor Society to support high achieving students in such programs.

While all high schools have the option of offering law electives, law magnets and criminal justice academies throughout the state provide a broader curriculum emphasis in the law. Several common features distinguish law magnets and academies. These include: 1) multiple law courses offered on campus; 2) unique facilities and programs including courtrooms on campus, forensic labs, etc., and 3) use of attorneys

and judges as well as interactive teaching strategies to supplement the curriculum with real world experiences. Many programs offer internships or externships with attorneys or judges.

Law-related education combines substance with interactive, proven strategies to teach students the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be active, productive citizens knowledgeable about the law and our legal process and dedicated to preserving democracy and improving the administration of justice. FLREA is the premier law related program in the country advancing law magnets and law academies and providing specialized services and training to teachers in these programs. Innovative academic competitions such as the high school mock trial competition,



Students from Palm Beach Lakes High School in the role of attorneys at the Florida High School Mock Trial State Finals Competition.

appellate brief-writing and moot court competition, constitutional studies competition, and the US Senate Youth program add exciting opportunities for students with an interest in the law. FLREA also provides training and curriculum development initiatives.

The Law Magnet Movement

The evolution of Florida's law-related

education movement has seen unprecedented developments. In 1994, The Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to identify and provide services to schools with a special curriculum focus in law. A network of law magnet schools and academies developed throughout the state. These schools offer a wide range of programs for students with law-related interests. Courses such as law studies, comprehensive law studies, legal systems and concepts, criminal justice assisting, court procedures, court internships, constitutional law, international law and numerous other courses are offered. The Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. has played a critical role in the development and expansion of such courses.

Many of these schools infuse law into other traditional subject areas as well, such as math, language arts, and science. Additionally, courtrooms or even forensic labs may be found on these campuses. You may also find some well respected attorneys who have decided to leave the courtroom to instead take their place at the head of the class. In Florida, attorneys such as Cynthia Schmidt of Orlando, Luis Bonilla of Palm Beach County, Frances Lynch and Doug Oswald of Ocala, and Charlotte Anderson of Miami are but a few of the attorneys who have taken on full time teaching positions to pass on their love for the law to the next generation.

The term "magnet" grew out of the desegregation movement. These programs were designed to "attract" students to specific schools. A wide range of law-related academies also exist, such as criminal justice, law and public service, and international law. A career academy is a school-within-a-school that offers students

academic programs organized around broad career themes. Such programs promote the integration of various subjects related to law and government into the core high school curriculum. Academies integrate classroom instruction with work-based learning, field studies, job shadowing and internships. Career academies equip students with the necessary skills for both work and secondary education. Teachers often work in conjunction with business partners from the fields of law and government services.

Students interested in a wide range of law-related careers are attracted to law magnets and academies where they will be exposed to innovative law-related experiences. However, even students with no interest in law-related careers are drawn to these schools because of the innovative curriculum and practical life skills application.

These special law-related schools require the active involvement of Florida's legal and judicial communities. Non-lawyer teachers may need resource persons to supplement their content knowledge in these law-related courses. Lawyers and judges can serve as resource persons in and out of the classroom. Programs such as Justice Teaching can help provide access to these much needed resources.

Profiles

Profiles of several schools follow to demonstrate the variety of programs offered throughout Florida. These programs provide a broad range of academic and clinical experiences for students and represent a diverse array of models. For additional information, contact Annette Boyd Pitts, Executive Director, The Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. at abpflreaed@aol.com or staff@flrea.org.

Boone High School Criminal Justice, Law and Finance Magnet (Orlando)



*Cindy Schmidt, Law Magnet
Teacher at William R. Boone
High School*

The Criminal Justice, Finance and Law Magnet offers three career emphases each with the primary goal of college preparation and career exploration.

Criminal Justice

explores careers at the local, state and federal levels of law

enforcement, corrections and private security. Students earn seven hours college credit for the three criminal justice classes. Finance is a four-year program for students with a professional career interest in business. Law provides a basic knowledge of criminal, civil and constitutional law and judicial proceedings. Career-related guest speakers, field trips, mentors, job shadowing and internship opportunities are part of the program.

Boone High School

2000 S. Mills Avenue, Orlando, FL 32806
(407) 893-7200

<http://www.boonebraves.ocps.net>

Contact: Cindy Schmidt

Pensacola High School Academy of Law and Public Service

The academy program at Pensacola High School offers a comprehensive program to students in grades 9-12, who wish to pursue interests in law-related or government service careers. Students work in an atmosphere which fosters independent

learning, participation in research, and community projects. The program is available to students entering the 9th or 10th grade and will prepare those students for gainful law-related employment following high school graduation or for college programs that culminate in law-related occupations.



*Pensacola High School
Academy of Law Students at
the Capitol in Tallahassee.*

Pensacola High School
500 West
Maxwell Street
Pensacola, Florida
32501
(850) 595-1500
http://www.pensacolahighschool.org/phs_main.htm
Contact: Dr.
Sarah Ussery

Fort Lauderdale High School Pre-Law and Public Affairs Magnet

This program is a college preparatory course of study that is designed for students who are interested in exploring various careers in Law, Criminal Justice and Public Affairs. Located in Fort Lauderdale, the county seat, the program has ready access to all governmental agencies which are utilized as "living laboratories" for the ultimate learning experience. The courtroom on campus affords students the opportunity to conduct mock trials and experience all phases of trial and court procedures. The program enjoys overwhelming support of the legal community which enables the faculty to bridge academic and practical experiences in law related studies.

Law classes include Courtroom Procedures, Constitutional law and International Law as

well as other law related classes which enable students to experience the American legal system and participate in classroom mock trials and compete statewide. All students may have the opportunity for mentors in "off campus" executive internships, and dual enrollment. Students also participate in the executive internship program.

Fort Lauderdale High School
1600 NE 4th Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33305
(754) 322-1115
<http://www.broward.k12.fl.us/fortlauderdalehigh/Pages/Programs/LawMagnet/FLHSLawMagnet.html>
Contact: Frank DeRusso

Palm Beach Lakes Community High School Center for Pre-Law Magnet

The Center for Pre-Law Magnet is the first and only magnet program of its kind in Palm Beach County. Students are recruited from all public and private middle schools throughout the county. In addition to the standard high school core curriculum, the curriculum includes law related and leadership skills courses providing pathways for careers leading toward law studies, business technology education, and legal assistant technology through partnerships with local colleges.



*Luis Bonilla, Pre-Law
Magnet Teacher at
Palm Beach Lakes
Community High
School.*

The objectives of the Center for Pre-Law Magnet are to (1) help young adults determine if their future lies within the field

of law (i.e. Attorney, Police, Elected Officials, etc.) through study and hands-on application (i.e. Trial simulations, writings, argument, dialectic), (2) mold reasoned individuals dedicated and knowledgeable of our laws and legal process, with a commitment to equal justice, social responsibility and the resolution of disputes, (3) assist students in developing critical thinking, problem solving and leadership skills, and (4) make learning exciting and relevant through interactive and innovative methods of instruction.

Palm Beach Lakes Community High School

3505 Shiloh Drive West

Palm Beach, FL 33405

(561) 640-5000

http://www.edline.net/pages/Palm_Beach_Lakes_High_School/PBL_Magnet_Programs/Pre-Law_Brochure

Contact: Luis Bonilla

Atlantic High School Academy of Law and Government

The mission of the Academy of Law and Government is to afford qualified students a challenging interdisciplinary instructional program. This comprehensive program



Mock Trial students from the Academy of Law and Government at Atlantic High School.

provides students with information that is relevant to their career interests in public service, law, and/or various governmental

agencies. The Academy of Law and Government provides information and intern experiences in careers for students whom aspire to be lawyers, legal secretaries, court reporters, police officers, forensic scientists, crime lab technicians and other law and government related fields. Students participate in Teen Court and other community service projects.

Atlantic High School

1250 Reed Canal Road

Port Orange, FL 32129

(386) 322-6100

http://schools.volusia.k12.fl.us/atlantic/law_govt/home.htm#law

Contact: Delia Boehm

Wolfson High School Law Magnet (Jacksonville)

Students take the following sequence of classes as law magnet students: Grade 9 - Introduction to Law Studies : As a beginner course in the American Legal System, examines both criminal and civil law as well as the due process rights of citizens; Grade 10 - Legal Systems and Concepts : An in-depth examination of legal procedures. Court procedures are examined through the case study and mock trial approaches; Grade 11 - Comprehensive Law Studies: Provides an in-depth examination of the workings of our criminal and civil justice systems. Content will include application of learning to simulated real-life problems; Grade 12 - Court Procedures/Court Internship: Provides an in-depth study of civil and criminal processes of both the U.S. and Florida court systems in conjunction with local attorney volunteers.

Wolfson High School

7000 Powers Avenue

Jacksonville, FL 32217

(804) 739-5265

<https://www.duvalschools.org/wolfson/new%20website/magnet%20information%20page.htm>

Contact: Mono Edwards

Miami Carol City Law Academy

The Career Academy Model divides a large high school population into smaller groups of students to promote greater efficacy and personalization of study. Academies are schools-within-a-school program with specific career themes and strong ties to the business community. The Academy of Legal, Public Safety, Corrections and Security focuses on careers in law, criminal justice, and JROTC.

Miami Carol City High School

3422 NW 187 Street

Miami, FL 33056

(305) 621-5681

<http://mccsh.dadeschools.net/Career%20Academies.htm>

Contact: Dr. Charlotte Anderson

Jefferson High School International Studies Magnet (Tampa)

The academy provides students with an understanding of law from an international perspective integrating ethics, technology and public service as related to the study of international law and criminology. Classes include international law studies, international criminal justice, international court procedures, international legal system and concepts, and constitutional law.

Jefferson High School

4401 W. Cypress Street

Tampa, FL 33607

(813) 872-5241

<http://jefferson.mysdhc.org/teacher/3784rodriguez/>

Academy Director: Tony Rodriguez



Students from the Jefferson High School International Studies Magnet.

Conclusion

These profiles represent a sampling of the innovative programs which span the state to provide students with a realistic and practical understanding of our legal system and the U.S. Constitution. Although law magnet schools and academies offer a specialized curriculum in the law, many non-magnet, regular schools also offer extensive law-related elective courses including law studies, comprehensive law studies, court procedures, legal systems and concepts, and public affairs. In Florida, a half-credit American Government course is also required for graduation.

The law magnet and academy school movement has provided opportunities for a diverse student body to participate in our democratic institutions and practice the skills of citizenship. Students learn to think critically, make reasoned decisions, and look at issues from multiple perspectives while experiencing our justice system firsthand.

To find out if a program exists near you, contact FLREA at staff@flrea.org.