



## Indiana Court Reaches Out to Local Students

The U. S. District Court for the Southern District of Indiana has launched a series of educational programs that reach out to local schools and community groups in an effort to teach school children at all levels about the federal courts and their impact on students' own lives.

The programs consist of field trips developed and sustained by the court's historian, Doria Lynch. Lynch said, "Creating and advertising the activities took about eight months. Many of the activities we offer are combinations of lesson plans developed by the Administrative Office, suggestions made by teachers, and ideas of my own." The field trips are generally aimed at fifth, eighth, and twelfth graders, although students of all ages have been through the program.

In the first stage of developing the field trips, the court created focus groups of local educators. After touring the building and establishing the goals of the education program, the groups made recommendations such as offering the field trips at no cost to schools, promoting to teachers directly via e-mail, allowing the kids to meet a judge, and incorporating state and national educational standards into the lessons being offered.

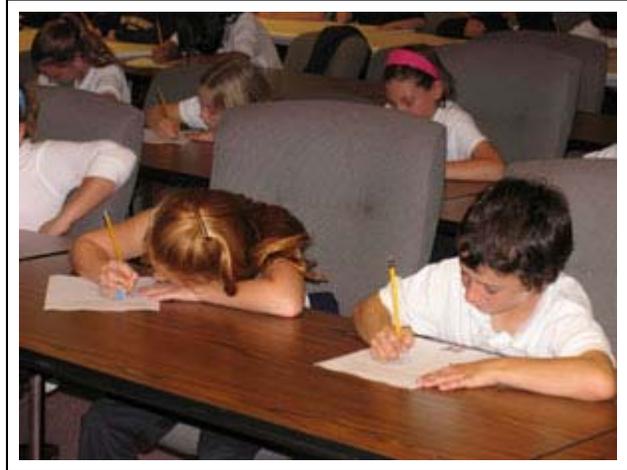
Some of the educators brought their own students to the courthouse to review the program in its early form. Indianapolis Public School teacher Norvin Conway was a member of the middle school focus group, and his eighth grade students were among the first to participate in the program: "My students really enjoyed meeting Judge Hamilton and seeing the courthouse. It was a great opportunity for them to have a positive personal experience with the courts."

Clearly, said Lynch, the judges in the Southern District of Indiana play an important role in making the field trips memorable for the students. Magistrate Judge Tim A. Baker said, "I always enjoy talking with the students. They ask great questions and have interesting perspectives. Sometimes you can just see a little light turning on inside their heads as they realize the court system is much different than they thought."

A typical field trip to the Indianapolis courthouse lasts two hours. Students gather in the jury assembly room for a brief introduction to the federal court system and the courthouse itself and then take a 45 minute tour. Whenever possible, the students also spend 15 minutes meeting with one of the Southern District's judges or observing a hearing or trial. Students then return to the jury assembly room to participate in a hands-on activity, such as mock jury selection, a debate on the Constitution and students' rights, or learning about the symbols of justice and government.

Teachers are contacted directly via e-mail to encourage them to bring their students to this new field trip destination in Indianapolis. While these programs have been available for only two months, the court already has reservations for field trips booked into May 2008. The education programs at the U. S. District Court for the Southern District of Indiana are also advertised online at the [court's public website](#).

For more information about developing outreach programs in your community, visit [J-Net](#) and [uscourts.gov](#), or contact AO Outreach Manager [Rebecca Fanning](#). Phone: 202-502-2600.



*Fourth graders participating in an IN-Southern outreach program try their hand at passing the naturalization test required of applicants for U.S. citizenship.*

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