

A large, stylized, light blue silhouette of a pair of scales of justice is positioned on the left side of the cover. The scales are centered vertically and extend from the bottom to the top of the page. The background consists of horizontal stripes in various shades of blue.

EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE LAW:

GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL LAWYERS

Dear colleagues:

As members of the legal profession, we serve as the guardians and caretakers of the American justice system. Our responsibilities include improving public understanding of the justice system and sustaining public confidence in it.

In February 2000, the ABA's House of Delegates passed the resolution "that the American Bar Association encourages every lawyer to consider it part of his or her fundamental professional responsibility to further the public's understanding of and confidence in the rule of law and the American system of justice." This resolution, building upon previous ABA policy statements urging organized bar support for public legal education, provides a specific mandate for individual lawyers to view public legal education as part of their fundamental obligation as members of the profession.

In response to the resolution, the ABA's Division for Public Education has written this guide for individual lawyers, intended to

- introduce the many opportunities for participating in public legal education,
- provide practical advice on how lawyers can effectively communicate with public audiences,
- identify resources that can assist lawyers in fulfilling this important obligation to the profession and the public it serves,
- highlight existing programs that depend on the contributions of volunteer lawyers, and
- offer the personal insights of legal professionals on the value of public legal education.

Many of the ideas in this guide were provided by schools and organizations that currently offer law-related education and rely upon the efforts of volunteer attorneys. They thus represent real opportunities—and real needs—for the contributions of individual lawyers.

Legal professionals possess a wealth of education, skills, and experience that they can bring to students of all ages, adding immeasurably to the public's understanding of and respect for our legal system. We hope that you will contribute your time and talents.

Sincerely yours,



Allan J. Tanenbaum, Chair

Standing Committee on Public Education

Why You Should Educate the Public

In 1999, the American Bar Association released the results of a nationwide survey of public perceptions of the U.S. justice system. The results confirmed the need to build public confidence and trust in the justice system through better public understanding. While a solid majority agreed that “the American justice system is still the best in the world,” that positive sentiment was tempered by perceptions of problems in many areas of the justice system. In particular, many participants in the survey had poor perceptions of the legal profession:

- Only 14% were extremely or very confident in the legal profession, while 42% were slightly or not at all confident.
- 43% thought that lawyers do not contribute enough to their community through donations of time, legal services, or money.
- 51% thought we would be better off with fewer lawyers.

The news was not all bad: personal experiences with lawyers were typically quite positive. Seventy-five percent of the people surveyed had used a lawyer in the past five years, and 53% of these individuals were “very satisfied.” In contrast, only 11% were “very dissatisfied” with the services their lawyer provided. Moreover, 61% of the people surveyed wanted to learn more about the justice system, and they wanted to learn it from people most familiar with the law: judges, law-school professors, and lawyers. And the study confirmed that the more people know about the law, the more confidence they have in the legal system and its practitioners.

In a 1999 ABA-sponsored survey of public perceptions of the U.S. justice system:

- 61% expressed a desire to learn more about the justice system.
- 32% said they were extremely or very confident in the judiciary.
- 14% said they were extremely or very confident in the legal profession.

What Is Public Legal Education?

Public legal education encompasses a broad range of activities—from speaking to a classroom of students to participating in an “Ask a Lawyer” call-in program to writing an op-ed piece for your local newspaper. It also includes offering support to the many schools and community-based organizations that are already trying to further public understanding of the law.

program profile

Hale and Dorr LLP's Youth & Education Initiative

"Hale and Dorr" is a phrase often heard in the classrooms and corridors. To students, "Hale and Dorr" means "we're important, we count—somebody in the tall building downtown thinks we can be successful." To teachers, it means "we're appreciated and we're supported," and to parents it says, "we're not alone in trying to help our children achieve their dreams."

—Cathedral High School, Boston, Massachusetts

Hale and Dorr LLP—with offices in Boston and Waltham, MA; Washington, D.C.; New York, N.Y.; Reston, Va.; and Princeton, N.J.—has made a comprehensive commitment to enhance educational opportunities for children and teens through its Youth & Education Initiative. Seeking to increase the impact of its charitable activities, Hale and Dorr decided to establish focused, long-term partnerships—combining volunteer service and an aggregate \$1,125,000 in financial support over three years—with four organizations that serve inner-city youth, from preschoolers to high school seniors.



Hale and Dorr's Managing Partner, Bill Lee, with legal apprentices from the James A. Garfield Elementary School at the Spring 2000 Mock Trials.

The Youth & Education Initiative supports Citizen Schools, Cathedral High School, and Teen Empowerment—all located in Boston—and the Boston and Washington, D.C., branches of Jumpstart. Hale and Dorr's attorneys and staff assist their nonprofit partners by volunteering at learning fairs; hosting summer internships, career days, and college application workshops; and teaching classes that give students their first substantive insight into the law. Through such programs, Hale and Dorr cooperates in the mission to boost child literacy and maximize school-retention rates and college readiness, while potentially increasing the future diversity of the legal field.

Hale and Dorr's partnership with Citizen Schools is a striking example of volunteer attorneys using their legal training to enhance student appreciation of the law. Citizen Schools is an innovative, hands-on after-school program that unites "Citizen Teachers" with student apprentices. In the ten-week Legal Apprenticeship Program, Hale and Dorr associates teach eight to nine middle school students the basics of litigating a trial. Classes are supplemented by visits from Firm "guest speakers," including distinguished senior partners. The program culminates in an evening of mock trials, bringing together several Citizen Schools teams, who have worked with Boston law firms, to perform in front of federal and state judges at Boston's J. Joseph Moakley Federal Courthouse.

The Youth & Education Initiative's benefits are clearly reciprocal. The organizations enjoy the long-term support of a law firm committed to their success, as well as a reliable source of volunteer lawyers to enhance their programs. Within the Firm, the initiative acts as an "internal glue" among partners, associates, and staff, instilling a collective sense of pride and accomplishment. "I think that we probably get more out of it than the kids do," says Greta Sobral, a Corporate Department associate. "We get to reconnect to that part of ourselves that we don't have during the day. As attorneys, we are so used to dealing with adversaries, and our day-to-day lives are very guarded, in a sense. Working with children is an opportunity to speak in a completely different voice."