



21st Century Learning: Law-Related Education in South Tucson

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The Partnership for 21st Century Skills describes an ideal 21st century education this way: it teaches skills through both core subjects and interdisciplinary themes; it uses innovative, inquiry-based learning methods that are supported by technology; it emphasizes higher order thinking skills; and it encourages the integration of community resources beyond school walls.¹ These rich opportunities must be afforded to all American young people, not just to honor students in wealthy school districts.

The 21st Century Skills group could have written these goals with Arizona's Cholla High School Magnet Law Program in mind. Located in the Tucson Unified School District, Cholla serves 1,800 students in South Tucson, with extensive assistance from Title I funding; over three-fourths of the students are Hispanic. The program was started 11 years ago by Dr. Deborah Cunningham, using magnet grant money and targeted desegregation funding.

The law magnet offers four years of intensive experiences in law-related education to any student who wishes to apply, without academic qualifications of any kind. If a special education student is capable of handling the workload, he or she is welcomed into the program.

The skills acquired in the magnet help to create success in other subjects. Students agree that it has helped their research and study skills, and improved their ability to communicate in front of an audience and not feel shy. The Carnegie sponsored *Civic Mission of*

Schools Report cites the latter skill as one all pupils should acquire in school, so that as young citizens they can “act politically by having the skills, knowledge, and commitment needed to accomplish public purposes, such as group problem solving, public speaking, petitioning and protesting, and voting.”² Cholla's law program concentrates on these skills, in the classroom and in real world settings.

A distinctive feature of the program is that actual Tucson justice court trials have been brought to the Cholla Global Courtroom, which has the capability to film and broadcast online. Students observe the proceedings, and some play the roles of court personnel. Senior Pima County Justice of the Peace Jose Luis Castillo Jr. has tried several cases in Cholla's Global Courtroom, including civil traffic infractions, assault, and shoplifting; students witnessed the cases from jury selection to verdict and sentencing. He really enjoys bringing a trial to the Cholla courtroom, which is more advanced technologically than

most of the venues he uses. Castillo says, “The Cholla Magnet School Global Courtroom project is one of my favorite judicial functions, not just because I get a chance to shed light on the third branch of government to young citizens of our community, but particularly because the students see the vitality of the Constitution and the enforcement of society's laws firsthand.”

Although Castillo has brought real cases to the school, mock trial lies at the heart of the program, and even freshmen can participate in it. This year's case, tried in high schools all over the United States, was *Holliday vs. Unamon*, focusing on the issues of an individual's religious rights in contrast to the community good. A fictitious student named Rastafarian Holliday refused a tuberculosis inoculation on religious grounds, and Dean Unamon refused to let him attend classes on campus. Veronica Rodriguez put her case study into action: “I did research on tuberculosis and what is amazing is that I had a T.B. shot.” Veronica added that mock trial “gave me that extra push to go to school.” Zack McNutt had the opportunity to play a lawyer, and found it taught him to think quickly so that he could respond instantly to objections by opposing counsel.



Teacher Tom Moore and student judge Stefeny Ramirez.



Magnet co-director Linda Santa Cruz stands beside a recruitment poster. The police officer on the far left in the poster is a magnet program graduate.



Roger Jimenez, teacher Tom Moore, Georgia Smith, Veronica Rodriguez film testimony in *Holliday v. Unamon*.

Magnet classes require immersion into in-depth online legal research. Cholla has two state-of-the-art computer law labs, one with 20 stations and the other with 35. They are occasionally configured for group systems projects: all students address an issue, communicating with the group online immediately—and anonymously. Only the teacher knows whose posting is whose. The live feed and wall screen also brought students into the offices of Congressman Jim Kolbe for an interactive session with students.

Students travel into downtown Tucson for a constellation of activities and instruction: they observe and participate in justice and superior courts, the Tucson Police Department stations

and forensic labs, attorneys' offices, border control facilities, and the juvenile detention center. When they complete the Saturday sessions of the Teen Police Academy offered by the police department, they receive three credits at Pima Community College. During summers, they can attend "FBI Camp" or a forensics workshop at the University of Arizona.

The four courses called "Youth and Government" taken by magnet students, incorporate Street Law materials and a health and safety component. Forensic coursework ties together the social studies and science departments at Cholla. The police department's Praetorian Defense Group trains magnet partici-

pants in public safety and disaster preparedness, and the "Desert Five" certifies them in CPR.

Faculty members Linda Santa Cruz, social studies department chair, and George Parra direct the program. The magnet teachers work over summers developing curriculum and planning field trips and projects, and after a decade, their enthusiasm is unflagging. Santa Cruz is proud of the program and its graduates—attorneys, police officers, a member of the border patrol, and ordinary young people. "They retain this learning, the public speaking, the meeting and interacting with adults. They see their access to the system," she says. 🌐

Notes

1. Partnership for 21st Century Skills, www.21stcenturyskills.org.
2. *Civic Mission of Schools Report Executive Summary*, civicmissionofschools.org/cmossite/campaign/cms_report.html.

SYD GOLSTON is NCSS president-elect and social studies consultant in the Phoenix Union High School District. In 1999, the Cholla High School Global Courtroom program won the NCSS Program of Excellence Award.