



Teachers' Law School Event Coordinator Toolkit

Introduction

The American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA) is proud to present the Teachers' Law School, a program conceived by David Halpern, TEX-ABOTA member and assistant attorney general for the state of Texas. The goal of the Teachers' Law School is to celebrate the teachers who are educating our nation's young people about civics and law, and to help equip those teachers to better prepare students for their roles in civic life. Since being developed in Texas, similar programs have been held in Colorado and Sacramento.

As directed by Halpern, over the course of three days the Teachers' Law School exposes teachers of primarily government, history and social studies to presentations, roundtables and workshops on topics aimed at giving teachers the tools to help their students better understand and appreciate the value of the American civil and criminal legal systems and the role those systems play in students' lives and society. To maintain the personal touch, interactive nature and intimate feel of the event, each session has hosted between 15 and 30 teachers at a time.

ABOTA created this toolkit to help interested members and chapters host a successful Teachers' Law School event. It provides information, suggestions, templates, checklists and guidance designed to help you plan and implement a local event from start to finish. Included you will find materials on the following topics.

- Overview of the Teachers' Law School
- Selecting an event format (sample program agenda available separately)
- Selecting a venue
- Securing speakers and selecting topics
- Coordinating teacher participation (sample application, acceptance and wait-list letters, expense reimbursement and evaluation documents available separately)
- Publicizing the event (sample media advisory and news release available separately)
- Planning tasklist (sample document available separately)

Much of the guidance found in this toolkit is based on the first-hand lessons learned and experiences of the ABOTA members who've successfully hosted these events in the past and offered their wisdom during its development. We thank them for their support and notes from the front lines of the Teachers' Law School program.

If you are planning an event, please let the ABOTA national team know (1-800-779-5879). We'd be happy to address any questions or concerns you might have and to help you make your event a success.





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Teachers' Law School An Overview

Note: This descriptor can be modified as needed to become boilerplate/standard language for event materials.

Teachers' Law School

The American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA) Foundation and [chapter name] are proud to present the Teachers' Law School. Our Teachers' Law School program, designed for middle school and high school government, social studies, history, law and civics educators, exposes participants to presentations, roundtables and workshops on topics aimed at giving teachers the tools to help their students better understand and appreciate the value of the American civil and criminal legal systems and the role those systems play in students' lives and society.

Statistics have shown that more than half of high school graduates in America don't know the three branches of government. Through ABOTA's Teachers' Law School, some of the best and brightest members of the [state/location] bench and bar, who live and work with the law day in and day out, will share practical realities of the civil and criminal law procedures and systems that protect students, their parents, their teachers, and all Americans.

Interested teachers should complete and submit an application, [note where available, how to submit, and deadline]. Space is limited. Participants will be provided [list high-level key details of acceptance, including travel, meals, lodging and extra activities, as appropriate].





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Selecting an Event Format

To date, the Teachers' Law School programs hosted by ABOTA members have been two- to three-day events featuring multiple educational sessions to help 15 to 30 teachers at a time better connect with their students and educate them on the American legal system. In addition, each event has featured meals and activities designed to show ABOTA's appreciation for the teachers in its communities. Other approaches to this format — maintaining the dual focus on teacher education and appreciation — are certainly possible, and we encourage members to find a format that works for them. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you decide on the size, scope and format of your event.

- **Basic event formats.** You should feel free to design the event that is right for your chapter and your teachers. As a starting point to design your event, below are three basic event overviews: for a full-scale, multi-day event; a mid-scale, one-day event; and a small-scale event.

Full-Scale Event	Mid-Scale Event
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Midday registration ○ Welcome from ABOTA and opening remarks from a guest speaker ○ 2-3 educational sessions ○ Evening welcome dinner or reception hosted by the ABOTA chapter • Day 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Catered, on-site breakfast and lunch ○ 4 educational sessions ○ Afternoon field trip(s), e.g., court tour and meetings with judges ○ Free night • Day 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Catered, on-site breakfast ○ 2 educational sessions ○ Wrap-up and midday dismissal • Mix of civil and criminal law topics • Provide teachers with flash drive and DVDs of speaker presentations after the event, as well as some giveaways (logoed portfolio, pen, tote bag, desk clock, book by one of the speakers, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Morning registration ○ Welcome from ABOTA and opening remarks from a guest speaker ○ Catered, on-site breakfast and lunch ○ 4-5 educational sessions OR 3-4 educational sessions and a short field trip ○ Evening dinner or reception, hosted by the ABOTA chapter • Same topic mix and handouts/giveaways as full-scale event
	Small-Scale Event
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Registration ○ Welcome from ABOTA ○ 2 educational sessions in conjunction with lunch or dinner hosted by the ABOTA chapter • Same topic mix and handouts/giveaways as full-scale event





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- **Calendar time.** Consider the time span between when you begin planning and when the event will be, keeping in mind the educational calendar of your state or community (i.e., Are most schools in session year round? Would summer be easiest for the teachers? If looking at a small-scale event, such as an event at a single school or school district, is there a time that makes the most sense for that school's calendar?). Larger events, with more details, tend to need longer lead-time to secure a venue and coordinate all event logistics, while smaller events don't require as much advance planning.
- **Planner time commitment.** Consider the amount of time that you or your planning team has available to devote to planning the event. Though all events require old-fashioned elbow grease, larger-scale events tend to require more hours to plan and coordinate than small-scale events.
- **Your style.** Some people like to inch their way into a new challenge; others prefer to go in full-bore. If starting small, learning from the process, and sizing up next year conforms more to your style, that is something to keep in mind. If, however, you like to jump right in to the deep end and rise to challenges, a larger event could be just the ticket.
- **Connection to schools, speakers and spaces.** We explore each of these topics in greater detail later in this toolkit, but a quick thought about those three items up front may help you decide on the format that is best for your event. If you have specific connections already with teachers, schools or school systems, the nature of those connections may influence your decision. Local and state bar associations are great resources in many states and metropolitan areas for finding established relationships with schools and teachers, as well as how to reach those schools and teachers; be sure to utilize this resource. If you have several speakers/presenters in mind from whom securing participation would be relatively easy, you may consider hosting a larger-scale event to accommodate them. You could also utilize your chapter members as the speakers/presenters to give prepared presentations or workshops instead of a larger event. Finally, your event will be physically limited by the venue you select; if you have one in mind, that can decide the event format for you at the outset.
- **Additional flexibility.** An additional idea that can be considered with respect to the format is incorporating elements of other ABOTA educational programs into the event, such as the Justice by the People curriculum. Depending on the format and audience size you choose, there may be natural ways to include activities, materials or conversations covered in other programs during your lecture event.

Keep an open mind, and you'll find ways to make your event perfectly suited to your interests and your audience. Sample program agendas from past events that you can personalize or use as inspiration for your own version can be downloaded here [\[insert link\]](#).





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Selecting a Venue

Your venue will play a role in setting the tone and agenda of your event. Here are a few things to consider as you select your location.

- **Historic locations.** Locations that have historic significance in your state or area could be a good option for the Teachers' Law School event itself (if space can be secured for long enough periods of time) or for field trips that are a part of the agenda. Historic buildings or sites of historic events can set a reflective tone. They provide a tie to the sense of history of our nation's civic underpinnings as well as offer an interesting and meaningful destination for the participants.
- **Hotels.** If your participating teachers are staying overnight during a multi-day event, hosting your Teachers' Law School sessions on site at the hotel certainly could be convenient from a logistical standpoint. It would eliminate some transportation and parking issues you could face with repeated venue changes, and hotels are equipped to provide AV and catering solutions, meeting spaces and reception/meal spaces. If you are including one or more field trips during your event, there is also a good chance you can find a hotel nearby that destination, further streamlining some of your transportation logistics.
- **Courts or other judicial locations.** Courthouses, legal associations and other similar buildings make good locations for this event or for field trips on your agenda. You or members of your chapter — as well as your speakers — certainly have connections and a familiarity with these spaces that could make planning easier. Many Americans rarely or never visit courthouses, so it would be something out of the ordinary and certainly tie into the topics of the program.
- **Law schools.** Law schools, or other college or university locations, are well set up for events of this nature. They have meeting spaces, theatres and lecture halls of all different sizes and typically have good signage, transportation, catering and logistical solutions for the event. ABOTA relationships here may also be a big benefit, as ABOTA members have had success with past events at securing law school spaces for free.
- **Central locations.** If you plan to visit several different buildings, facilities or tourist locations during your event, you may want to consider ways to keep those elements of the program in a geographically condensed area. In a best-case scenario, all of the venues would be within walking distance of one another.





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Securing Speakers and Selecting Topics

A teacher who helped give shape to the inaugural Teachers' Law School program explained that, while he doesn't have student-contact time to spare for a speaker to talk to his students about civics and the law, he does have time for someone to make him a better teacher. By putting the best and the brightest members of your area's bench and bar in touch with the teachers who directly impact the lives of students, and educating them about the topics they need to engage their students, the reach can be far greater than by going classroom to classroom ourselves.

Choosing speakers and topics for your Teachers' Law School event go hand in hand. Either one may lead the other, or they can be generated simultaneously. Below is advice and insight on securing your speakers and selecting the topics from those who've planned successful Teachers' Law School events in the past.

- **Brainstorm topics.** Identify a few friends representative of the various parties in this event — such as a judge, a teacher and a high school student — and brainstorm civil and criminal topics for the agenda. The priority should be to find those topics that will be of the most interest and relevance to students; by extension, those will be of the most interest to teachers. Such a group of brainstormers, whether contacted individually or all together, would give you a variety of perspectives to consider. With topics in mind, you can then look for experts who can speak knowledgeably on them. A sample listing of topics is provided at the end of this section as a reference.
- **Work your network.** Think about the specialties and areas of focus of the people in your network and consider whether any of them would be a good fit with this teacher (and indirectly, student) audience.
- **Look to a variety of backgrounds for speakers.** Consider acclaimed lawyers, judges and your own ABOTA chapter members as a start, as well as any other interesting individuals you may know or want to hear from, such as authors, legal professors or journalists.
- **Ripped from the headlines.** Look to the news for stories that contain legal themes and topics that are getting a lot of coverage or capturing the minds and conversations of people locally or nationally, and consider adding that to your agenda. For example, the Texas Teachers' Law School has featured a session on the intersection of criminal laws and constitutional rights in the polygamy/abuse cases of the nearby Yearning For Zion ranch; the session has been led by the lead prosecutor in those cases. Such timely examples are especially good at engaging students and teachers alike, and help drive home the relevance of the topic.





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- **Speaker compensation.** Many speakers are excited about the opportunity to speak to on a topic they are passionate about, and are willing to speak for free or for a minimal fee to reimburse their travel costs. Some of our event experts recommend giving speakers some token of appreciation, such as a plaque or hosting them for lunch or dinner after the event.
- **Speaker bios.** Once you have your speakers identified, you'll want to get their bios (or resumes or CVs). You'll be including biographical details about them in some of your publicity materials for the event, as well as in your course materials for the participating teachers.
- **Timely and timeless topics.** For timely course topics, consider any national or local legal events, trending topics and headlining court cases. You may also want to include timeless, evergreen topics, such as standard legal procedures or the Constitution as it relates to the modern day classroom.

Listed below, as examples, are topics that have appeared on the course agendas of past Teachers' Law School events:

- Introduction to the Justice Systems in [State]: Civil and Criminal
- Play By The Rules: [State] Laws for Youth
- Probable Cause, Search and Seizure, and the Fourth Amendment
- The Exclusionary Rule and Exceptions to It
- How Technology has Changed the Law and Way We Live
- Developments in Forensic Evidence
- Justice in America: A View from City Hall
- Trail by Jury: The History, the Constitution, and the Current State
- Constitutional Challenges for the Modern Classroom
- Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments: Civil Rights
- The Supreme Court of Justice Roberts
- The Federal Court System
- Criminal Justice: In Concept and In Reality
- Causes of Wrongful Conviction
- Where Criminal Laws and Constitutional Rights Intersect: Conflict of Church and State
- The Digital Footprints of Daily Life: Emerging Sources of Electronic Information and Evidence, How They Help Us and How They Can Hurt Us





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Topics that have appeared on the course agendas of past Teachers' Law School events, continued:

- School Law: Balancing Constitutional Freedoms Inside the Schoolhouse Gate
- Defending the Rule of Law at Guantanamo Bay
- What's Right With Our Criminal Justice System: A Defense Lawyer's Perspective
- The Foster/Adoptive Care Student: What You May Not Know and Can Do to Help
- Education Law: Constitutional Law in the Classroom
- Legal Ethics Quandaries in Witness Memory Retrieval and Modern Neuroscience
- The Court System: Jurisdiction and Levels
- Anatomy of a Juvenile Case: What Really Happens?
- Anatomy of a Criminal Case: What Really Happens?
- History of the Jury System: Why does it work?
- Social Media in High Schools: What can an Educator Do?
- The Constitution and High School Students: Balancing Interests on School Grounds
- Immigration Issues for the High School Teacher





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Coordinating Teacher Participation

Here are a few things to keep in mind as you coordinate locating, selecting and hosting your teacher participants.

- **The best audience.** The best audience for Teachers' Law School events is middle and high school teachers who cover civic and legal issues in their classrooms, such as government, social studies, history, law and civics. You also want your audience to be representative of the area you're focused on, be it a single school district or your entire state or region. Consider both basic geographic diversity as well as diversity of participants from inner-city, urban, suburban and rural areas.
- **Help from your bar association.** Your state or local bar association can be a great resource for coordinating teacher participation. Many bar associations have educational outreach components that have established relationships with the exact target audience of teachers with whom you'll be looking to connect. Tapping into their expertise up front can help tremendously in your planning process, from identifying the list of teachers to invite to apply, to promoting the event through relationships they have with teacher organizations and listservs, to other forms of support and assistance.
- **Establishing an application process.** Unless you're hosting a small-scale event, such as one for teachers in a single school district, you'll need to create an application process to help you keep your event to the desired size.
 - A sample application form that you can personalize or use as inspiration for your own version can be downloaded here [\[insert link\]](#).
 - Our experts recommend setting an application due date that is two months before a full-scale event, giving plenty of time for selecting the candidates and coordinating with them on logistics for their travel and accommodations. Smaller-scale or more localized events would require less lead-time.
 - Use whatever criteria you deem most appropriate to select your participants from your collection of applicants. A sample letter to accepted applicants that you can personalize or use as inspiration for your own version can be downloaded here [\[insert link\]](#).

Additionally, our experts recommend including the requirement for some sort of deposit from the selected teachers (\$50 is the Texas level) to secure their spot in the program, refundable to them upon arrival at the event. This is to limit the number of no-shows and ensure that participants are committed to attending.





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- You'll want to create a waiting/alternates list from your applicant pool in case some of your selected participants are unable to attend. A sample letter to wait-listed applicants that you can personalize or use as inspiration for your own version can be downloaded here [\[insert link\]](#).
- **Issuing invitations to apply.** As previously mentioned, your bar association may be your first stop for finding the teachers to invite to apply. Many state government websites offer an Excel file of all public school systems that you can download and use as the basis for a mailing list. Or you may consider tapping into contacts you have within a particular school or school system to access a contact list. If looking at schools statewide, the large master list may be as deep as you go, sending an invitation letter about the application process to each district. If your geographic area is smaller, such as a handful of schools, you may want to consider looking at the schools' websites to identify the best administrator(s) or teacher(s) to contact directly. A sample invitation letter for the application process that you can personalize or use as inspiration for your own version can be downloaded here [\[insert link\]](#).

You may also want to work with educators you know, your bar association or local teacher associations to find other ways help get the word out to the area you're serving about the application process being open, such as sending out information in the newsletters, message boards or listservs that these groups may have access to. You may also consider going where the teachers are to make the pitch to apply in person. For example, in Texas the Teachers' Law School coordinator makes a brief speaking appearance at a statewide teachers' conference each year to raise awareness of the program and to encourage interested teachers to apply.

- **Importance of relationships with schools.** For this event and any other educational outreach a chapter might conduct, establishing relationships within the educational system — with school boards, administrators at the district level (particularly those responsible for curriculum development), members of building administrations, government officials who oversee for education, etc. — can be extremely beneficial. Relationships with these individuals will help streamline event and program coordination, as well as put you in a better position to take advantage of opportunities with schools that you might not otherwise have known about. If you have these relationships already, be sure to tap into them for this event. If you don't yet have these relationships, consider this planning process a great first step at establishing them.





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- **Possibility of a pre-built audience.** If you're focusing on a small-scale audience, it may be possible for you to find a pre-built audience, time and venue by working with a school or school system, or educational association. For instance, you may find there is a local group of teachers in this subject area who meet quarterly for a conference and would like to have the Teachers' Law School be a part of it. Just be sure to keep in mind the dual goals of this program — both to celebrate the teachers who are educating our nation's young people about civics and law, and to help equip those teachers to better prepare students for their roles in civic life — when considering aligning with an existing group or event to ensure the goals are compatible.
- **Notes on finances.** The cost of hosting a Teachers' Law School program will vary widely with the size, scope and location of your event. To provide a ballpark sense, the Texas event, which covers travel to and from Austin, hotel accommodations, meals and all other program costs for all teachers, runs approximately \$1,300 per participant. TEX-ABOTA's funding model has been to encourage each chapter within the state to pledge scholarship funds to pay the way for a teacher to attend (when possible, a teachers from their area), with TEX-ABOTA providing additional funding. A small-scale event, on the other end of the spectrum, could cost as little as a few thousand dollars total.

Participating teachers are reimbursed within a few weeks of the program's conclusion. Sample documents for the reimbursement process that you can personalize or use as inspiration for your own version can be downloaded here [\[insert link\]](#).

- **Continuing education credit.** Like attorneys, most teachers have a requirement to complete continuing education courses to maintain their teaching certifications. The Teachers' Law School program could be a great opportunity for you to help these teachers work toward that requirement. As part of your planning, it is a nice touch to reach out to the state agency that oversees and regulates education to investigate the possibility and process for securing continuing education credit for the teachers who attend your program.
- **Special note on unions.** An issue that has not been encountered by our event organizers, but that is on their radar as a potential issue to address in certain locations, has to do with requirements of teachers' unions. In Florida, for example, there may be a component in unionized teachers' contracts that would require per diem compensation for participation in work-related activity outside the regular school day, such as a training session like the Teachers' Law School. We wanted to include a flag that this issue is potentially out there and something that very specific locations may need to address or look into during the planning process.





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- **Mementos.** Keeping with the idea of this program being part celebration of these teachers, the experts have provided some mementos and gift to participating teachers. For example, you might consider items like leatherlike portfolios, nice pens, tote bags, desk clocks, books relevant to the course material or written by one of your speakers, or other similar items as gifts for the participants. For all gifts, you'll want to have them embossed with the Teachers' Law School and ABOTA logos to commemorate and continue to promote the program.
- **Program content takeaways.** To help the teachers bring these lessons back home to their schools, students and colleagues, it is a nice idea to provide teachers with copies of all the course materials and presentations from the program. Better still, take video of each presentation and provide copies of the recordings to each teacher following the event. In Texas, for example, teachers are all given a flash drive with the presentation materials (PowerPoint decks, handouts, etc.) upon their departure from the program, and are mailed DVDs of the presentation videos following the program. This is extremely helpful to participating teachers as well as event organizers, who can use the materials for promoting the event and planning for future sessions of the Teachers' Law School.
- **Collect feedback.** Gathering feedback from your participants will help as you regroup and start planning and securing funders for your next Teachers' Law School event! Collect feedback from participants during or at the conclusion of the program when it is still fresh in their minds. You'll also want to send a follow-up survey via email attachment or using a free survey tool such as Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com), a few months after the event to reconnect with your teachers and to see whether and how they've been able to incorporate what they learned at the Teachers' Law School into their classrooms. Sample evaluation documents that you can personalize or use as inspiration for your own versions can be downloaded here [\[insert link\]](#).





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Publicizing the Event

Sharing the story about your event with media and the public is a great way to give it more reach and let more of your community members know about ABOTA and the work it does nationally and locally. Below are some thoughts and suggestions regarding publicizing your event.

- **Go online.** Put event details online on a chapter or state ABOTA website and social media channels, if possible. This will ensure that the invitees can find information and details about the event online if they need a reminder about logistics. It will also help provide an online footprint for members of the media who may be looking for more event details before or after the event.
- **Build a media list.** Generate a list of contact information for media who cover the event area (city, county or state) with whom you can communicate about the event. You can invite them to the event in advance using a media advisory and let them know more about the event on event-day using a press release (see points below).
 - **Brainstorm or research online for the news outlets** in your event area, which may include daily and weekly newspapers, community newsletters and news websites/blogs, talk radio stations, network TV affiliates, public access television stations, school district newsletters or publications, etc., as well as any legal or educational news magazines that are published in your community or professional networks.
 - For each of those outlets you've brainstormed, **find contact information** — name, phone and email — for two to four relevant contacts by searching the outlet's website. You'll most likely be looking for reporters or editors in education, legal, metro or community sections. If listed, also add to your list an "assignment editor" (whose role in a newsroom is to assign stories to reporters) and a general contact, such as phone and email for the "news desk" or "new tips" (which are generic catch-all mailboxes that are scanned through for news ideas).
 - If you have any existing contacts at news outlets, such as personal relationships or reporters you've talked to previously for a news story, **add your personal contacts to your list**, as well. Even if they are not the most appropriate contact for this specific story, the fact that you know each other can be a good way to get some help getting your news idea in front of the right person at that outlet.





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- **Invite media via a media advisory.** A media advisory is a standard-format document used to invite media to an event. Using the sample media advisory that can be downloaded [here \[insert link\]](#) as part of this toolkit, customize a media advisory for your event, including all relevant event details. About one week before your event (ideally before noon between Monday and Thursday), send your advisory via email to all of the contacts on your media list. If you have time, place follow-up calls to the news outlets about 48 hours in advance of the event, ensuring that the advisory was received and to see if the contact has any questions about the event.
- **Issue a news release the day of the event.** Issuing a news release is a great way to give reporters attending your event — as well as those unable to make it — details that will help them write a story about your event. In the days leading up to the event, customize the sample news release that can be downloaded [here \[insert link\]](#) as part of this toolkit. On the day of the event (ideally just as the event is starting), send your news release via email to all of the contacts on your media list. Have some printed copies of the release with you at the event to hand to reporters who may be in attendance.
- **Coordinate photography or video.** Having a photographer and/or videographer on hand to capture some or all of the program events is a good idea. Both provide several options for extending the useful life of the presentations throughout the year.

You can use the photographs for ABOTA publications and materials, and you can submit one or two good photos after the event to the outlets on your media list with a copy of the release (a welcome offering in many newsrooms that have ever-shrinking, overworked staffs). You can either hire a photographer, or enlist the help of a friend or chapter member with a nice camera to take photos for you.

You can hire a videographer, or enlist the help of a friend or chapter member, to record the event so that video snippets can be put together for the chapter website or social media channels in addition to the post-program DVDs for participants that were discussed in the “Coordinating Teacher Participation” section.

- **Event signage.** Simple but effective, consider having plenty of banners or signage at the event — and on the speaker’s podium, if possible — with the ABOTA name and logo. This will help cement in participants’ minds and photos/videos visuals that your organization was responsible for hosting this amazing event.
- **Notifying key third parties.** If there are other organizations or individuals whom you would like to be aware of the event, such as others in the legal community, you can consider sending them an email FYI along with a copy of the news release.





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- **Coordinating with public information offices.** Many school systems, historical locations and courthouses have public affairs, public information or communications offices that publicize events for those entities as part of their daily job function. As relevant, consider reaching out to those individuals to coordinate on media outreach. School system public information or media relations offices may be a particularly good resource for you, as they have existing relationships with the education reporters in the area and would be happy to promote the participation of their teachers in an event like this. For download [here \[insert link\]](#) as part of this toolkit you will find a sample news release that you can personalize and share with each participating teacher's school district to promote on its own letterhead and through its own media outreach channels.

