

**Judges and teachers partner to teach students Street Law**

*Practical law program expands to all district comprehensive high schools*



*Margaret Fischer, Judge Cindy Larsen and Cascade teacher Melissa Webster helped introduce Street Law to students throughout district high schools*

Everett, WA – Before their Street Law class, some students may have imagined it as a law lesson straight out of *Lord of the Flies*. The Street Law concept—teaching practical law to ordinary citizens—has roots in the early 1970s when Street Law pioneers first began their outreach into high schools. Their focus? Practical aspects of criminal law, juvenile justice, consumer law, housing law, and individual rights and liberties, according to [Street Law, Inc.](#)

What started as a grass roots effort when paisleys were popular and disco dominated, grew into an international program reaching students and community groups. In 2004, Washington Judges Foundation began partnering judges with teachers in local high schools. In more recent years, Street Law began to be included in some high school textbooks.

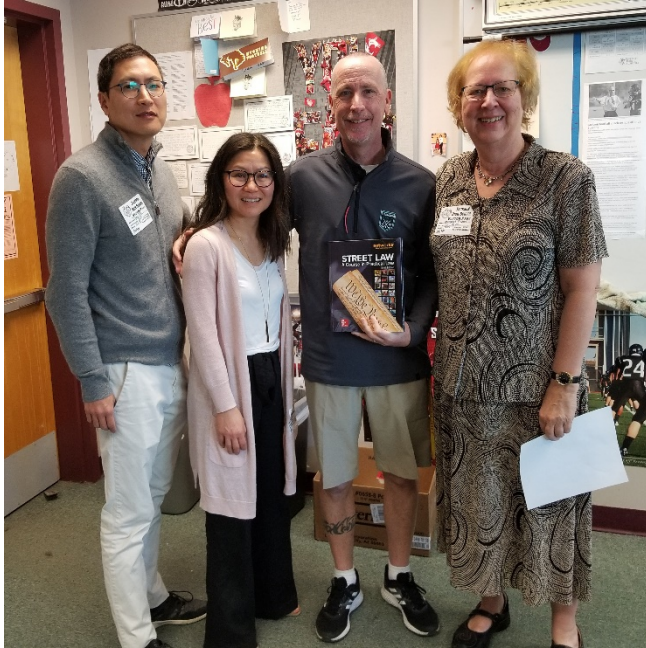
Cascade High School teacher and experienced Street Law instructor, Melissa Webster, has taught a Street Law class for Bruins since 2017. This year, with help from Street Law judges, she helped

expand the program to Everett and Jackson high schools. Judge Laura Van Slyck from Everett Municipal Court partnered with Everett High teacher Don Wilson. Judge Tam Bui of the Snohomish County District Court partnered with Jackson High teacher Joel Vincent. Judge Cindy Larsen partnered with Webster.

Webster was inspired during the United States Supreme Court Teacher Institute in Washington D.C. she attended in 2016. It was hosted by the Supreme Court Historical Society and Street law Program. “I have had the most fun teaching about the judicial branch, civil liberties and civil rights, and the court system in the Government classes I teach, but I would always run out of time. When I found out about the Street Law program and learned about the high schools in our state offering the class, I wanted to learn more!”

Webster explained that with the help of Margaret Fischer, Distinguished Practitioner in Residence, she wrote an Introduction to Law course proposal and asked for the support from Jackson and Everett as well. Fischer led the Street Law professional development for the teachers, helped them partner with their judges and helped secure grants for the textbooks.

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*Visiting South Korean Judge Ahn Jiyul observed and learned from the Street Law program implementation. Judge Tam Bui, Jackson teacher Joel Vincent and Margaret Fischer partnered to teach practical law to Jackson High students*

“Students are interested in learning about law, the judicial process and the many careers in law,” shared Webster. “It is important and paramount that students understand their rights and how to navigate the judicial process as adults. I also think it is important for educators to partner with our local judicial professionals to build bridges in our society.”

In addition to learning practical law, students occasionally have opportunities to practice their skills through mock trials. Local public defenders and city prosecutors sometimes join in those activities, giving students an authentic taste of practicing law.

Everett High teacher Don Wilson reflected, “One of the most challenging things about teaching is making the material appeal to and engage a wide range of students. Street Law allows for and provides a flexible and practical instructional model for presenting material that is easy to understand and relevant.”

When students better understand how law works and how their rights fit into the big picture, they are empowered. “Street Law/Intro to Law has taught me the beauty and complexity of the American Justice System,” shared Jackson High senior, Sri Ramachandran. “I enjoy the class because we try to answer complex questions with our new found legal knowledge.”

For some students like Alycia Bridges, a Cascade High senior, the experience led to a career decision. “In my intro to law class I had the opportunity to work with attorneys and judges from Everett. Working with them has solidified for me that I want a career in law.”

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**For more information:**

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