

*Community Relations Service*

*United States Department of Justice*

**COMMUNITY RELATIONS SERVICE**

Community Relations Service (CRS) is a component of the U.S. Department of Justice and a specialized Federal conciliation service. CRS is the Department's "peacemaker" for community conflicts and tensions arising from differences of race, color and national origin. Created by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, CRS is the only federal agency dedicated to preventing and resolving racial and ethnic tensions, incidents, and civil disorders, and in restoring racial stability and harmony. With passage of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, CRS also works with communities to employ strategies to prevent and respond to alleged violent hate crimes committed on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion or disability.

CRS does not take sides among disputing parties and, in promoting the principles and ideals of non-discrimination, applies skills that allow parties to come to their own agreement. CRS has no law enforcement authority and does not impose solutions, investigate, prosecute, or assign blame and fault. All CRS conciliators are required by law to conduct their activities in confidence and are prohibited from disclosing confidential information. Our services include conciliation, mediation, technical assistance, and training.

For almost 50 years, CRS has worked with schools across the nation. Many schools have experienced demographic changes. At times, tensions and disruptions will accompany the process of inclusion and assimilation. CRS has helped schools build strategies to improve lines of communication, establish programs to eliminate racial and ethnic misconceptions, and develop plans to prevent conflict and improve intergroup relations among students, faculty, staff, parents and community groups. SPIRIT is one such CRS program.



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**STUDENT PROBLEM  
IDENTIFICATION  
AND RESOLUTION  
OF ISSUES  
TOGETHER (SPIRIT)**

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## HOW WAS SPIRIT DEVELOPED?

Since 1964, the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Relations Service (CRS) has introduced a variety of methods and programs for reducing racial tension and violence in communities throughout the United States.

A conciliator recognized the value of student problem solving for racial issues and created the SPIRIT program. Since then, CRS has applied the principles of mediation, problem solving, and full engagement of the school community, to help improve the racial climate of schools. The Student Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together (SPIRIT) brings students, administrators, teachers, and parents together to identify issues, develop solutions, and take action on conflicts within their schools.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

- A student-driven program teaches problem solving techniques
- Students are empowered to identify and solve problems
- Students learn new and better ways to develop solutions and make decisions
- Natural student leaders from diverse backgrounds discover commonalities and learn to appreciate differences
- New safeguards are created to prevent conflict and minimize tensions
- SPIRIT establishes a proactive model to use for collaborative problem solving

## WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

SPIRIT improves communications among diverse student leaders and reduces racial tensions in schools. Additionally, SPIRIT helps to improve student-teacher relationships. SPIRIT also works to prevent violence and conflict among students in schools with changing demographic populations. CRS conducts SPIRIT programs throughout the country.

### **SPIRIT**

- ✓ Empowers students
- ✓ Builds collaboration
- ✓ Brings diverse groups together
- ✓ Develops decision-making skills



## OTHER CRS SERVICES

- ❖ Diversity Training
- ❖ Parent-School Dialogues
- ❖ Study Circles
- ❖ Peer Mediation

## ARE THERE PREREQUISITES?

Key prerequisites for conducting a SPIRIT program are:

- The school staff must be willing to identify natural student leaders who will participate in the program for one half day on two consecutive days.
- The principal must agree to meet with the SPIRIT council on its work plan at least on a monthly basis.
- The faculty should be open to the SPIRIT program and the development of a student work plan (CRS will brief the faculty before conducting the program).
- The school must identify and make available facilitators to assist in conducting the program.
- The program should be conducted "ideally" no later than February in the school year.

## NO FEES

All CRS services are FREE as a public service to our customers. Call (202) 305-2935

