

*Community Relations Service*

*United States Department of Justice*

**COMMUNITY RELATIONS SERVICE**

**The Community Relations Service (CRS)** is a component of the U.S. Department of Justice. CRS is a specialized Federal conciliation service available to State and local officials to help resolve and prevent racial and ethnic conflict, violence, and civil disorder. When governors, mayors, police chiefs, school superintendents and community organizations need help to defuse racial or ethnic crises, they turn to CRS. 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. CRS may assist these groups when race, national origin, and color are at issue.

**CRS** is an impartial third party. Our services are provided when requested or when there is an apparent threat to community stability. CRS conciliators do not have law enforcement authority and do not impose solutions, investigate or prosecute cases, or assign blame or fault. CRS conciliators are required by law to conduct activities in confidence and are prohibited from disclosing confidential information. Our services include conciliation, mediation, technical assistance, and training.

**For** more than 35 years, CRS has worked with schools across the nation. Many school systems have experienced major demographic changes. At times, tensions and disruptions will accompany the process of inclusion and assimilation. CRS has helped schools to 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 Community Relations Service (CRS), United States Department of Justice has introduced a variety of methods and programs for reducing racial tension and violence in communities throughout the United States.

More than 15 years ago, a CRS 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 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?

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

### **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 for 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.

## AT FEES YOU CAN AFFORD

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

