

Chapter 7: Connecting to the Courts¹

Visiting the Courthouse

What can students and teachers do at the courts?²

There are many learning opportunities awaiting students at South Carolina’s federal and state courts. Students might sit in on a trial; meet with a judge, attorney, or clerk of court; and/or tour the courthouse to learn more about all of the offices and agencies involved in a case before it comes to court.

Some suggested activities are:

Observe a trial: Often there will be a court session when students are visiting. Most, but not all, of these sessions are open to the public. Teachers can find out what is on the docket for the day they are planning to visit and request to bring students into the courtroom. Students should be prepared for the visit so that they understand it. Proper rules of decorum, including dress codes, must be followed if a class comes to observe a court session—ask when arranging the visit.

Take a tour: Taking a tour of a courthouse can help students better understand court procedure and the jobs of those who work in the courts. Students will learn what happens behind the scenes—information they don’t see on television court dramas. While students usually cannot visit judges’ chambers, they can tour a courtroom and talk to court personnel about how trials and hearings are conducted. If time permits, students may even be able to role play certain aspects of court procedure, such as *voir dire*, in the courtroom.

Talk with a judge or other personnel: Many judges will talk to students; however, judges have ethical guidelines that prohibit them from discussing cases that are pending or may come before them. Speaking personally to a judge can demystify the court experience for students, making them less fearful or suspicious of the legal process. Other participants in the legal process—such as the clerk of court, the bailiff, the court reporter, or attorneys involved—also may be willing to speak to students. Prosecutors and public defenders can help to illuminate the adversarial system. It is important that students be prepared for the interaction. Help them draft questions before and during the visit to ensure a productive learning experience.

¹ Betsy Goodale, Cynthia H. Cothran, and Paul Horne, Jr. are the contributing editors for this chapter.

² Some of the materials in this chapter were excerpted from *Understanding the Federal Courts*, a publication of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts.

How are visits set up?

Teachers who wish to take a class to court should call the court they want to visit to find out what services are available there to help students learn about the court system. Because the courts tend to be very busy, teachers should be prepared to allow several weeks of lead time when they are arranging a visit. Information about visiting courts is available by phone or online (see listing that starts below on the next several pages).

Whether the class is visiting a federal or state court, the personnel in the clerk's office or court information office can help teachers select an appropriate date for a class visit and can even find out what cases are on the docket if students wish to observe a court session. These court offices also will provide important logistical information, such as parking locations and directions. Some questions you may want to ask when scheduling a trip include:

- How many students may I bring to the court at one time?
- Which days and times are best to bring students to the court?
- What can my students do at the court?
- If we come to see a specific case and it settles, is there a back-up activity?
- What are the rules of decorum and dress the students must follow? (Generally, these include: no food or drink in the courtroom, no gum, no hats. There may be different rules for an individual court).
- Are there any judges who would be willing to speak to students? Prosecutors? Public defenders? Other court personnel? How can I set up a meeting with them?

Contacting the Courts

South Carolina Circuit Courts

www.sccourts.org/trial/circuit/index.cfm

To contact the county Circuit Courts, look in the government pages of the telephone directory or call South Carolina Court Administration at (803) 734-1800. The telephone numbers for the Clerk of Court Office in each county are also posted on the court system website at www.sccourts.org/trial/clerks/scmapimg.cfm

South Carolina Court of Appeals

www.sccourts.org/appeals

1015 Sumter Street
Columbia, SC 29201
(803) 734-1890

Tours of the South Carolina Court of Appeals, which is located in Columbia, can be arranged by calling the Court of Appeals' Clerk of Court's Office at (803)734-1890. Arrangements can be made to sit in on an oral argument while visiting the court.

South Carolina Supreme Court

www.sccourts.org/supreme

1231 Gervais Street
Columbia, SC 29201
(803) 734-1080

The South Carolina Supreme Court currently offers two programs for students - the Class Action Program and the Case of the Month (see Class Action Program listed later in listing). However, tours of the building are available at other times by calling the Supreme Court Clerk of Court's Office at (803) 734-1080.

Federal Courts in South Carolina (the Fourth Circuit)

U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina, Aiken Division

www.scd.uscourts.gov/Court/Aiken.asp

Charles E. Simmons, Jr. Federal Courthouse
223 Park Avenue, SW
Aiken, SC 29801
803-648-6896

The Aiken Division hears cases from Aiken, Allendale and Barnwell counties.

U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina, Anderson/Greenwood Division

www.scd.uscourts.gov/Court/Anderson.asp

G. Ross Anderson, Jr. Federal Building and United States Courthouse
315 South McDuffie Street, 2nd Floor
Anderson, SC 29624

The Anderson/Greenwood Division hears cases from Anderson, Oconee, Pickens, Abbeville, Edgefield, Greenwood, McCormick, Newberry and Saluda Counties.

U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina, Beaufort Division

www.scd.uscourts.gov/Court/Beaufort.asp

Beaufort Federal Courthouse
1501 Bay Street
Beaufort, SC 29902
843-521-2088

The Beaufort Division hears cases from Beaufort, Hampton and Jasper counties.

U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina, Charleston Division

www.scd.uscourts.gov/Court/Charleston.asp

Charleston Federal Courthouse
85 Broad Street
Columbia, SC 29401
843-579-1401

The Charleston Division hears cases from Charleston, Berkeley, Clarendon, Colleton, Dorchester and Georgetown counties.

U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina, Columbia Division

www.scd.uscourts.gov/Court/Columbia.asp

Matthew J. Perry, Jr. Courthouse
901 Richland Street
Columbia, SC 29201
803-765-5816

The Columbia Division hears cases from Richland, Kershaw, Lee, Lexington, and Sumter counties. In addition, the Rock Hill Division, which covers Chester, Fairfield, Lancaster and York counties, and the Orangeburg Division, which covers Bamberg, Calhoun and Orangeburg Counties, also hear cases at this courthouse.

U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina, Florence Division

www.scd.uscourts.gov/Court/Florence.asp

McMillan Federal Building
401 West Evans Street
Florence, SC 29501
843-676-3820

The Florence Division hears cases from Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Horry, Marion, Marlboro, and Williamsburg counties.

U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina, Greenville Division

www.scd.uscourts.gov/Court/Greenville.asp

Clement F. Haynsworth Federal Building
300 East Washington Street
Greenville, SC 29601
864-241-2700

The Greenville Division hears cases from Greenville and Laurens counties.

U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina, Spartanburg Division

www.scd.uscourts.gov/Court/Spartanburg.asp

Donald S. Russell Federal Building
201 Magnolia Street
Spartanburg, SC 29301
864-241-2711

The Spartanburg Division hears cases from Cherokee, Spartanburg and Union counties.

How should students be prepared for the visit?

The best time to visit a court is during a unit on the judicial system or the rights that the system protects. In this context, students can put their new knowledge to use by observing and interpreting court sessions and finding out more information from judges and other court personnel. In particular, it may be helpful for students to learn about the structure, functions, and procedures of the court before visiting. If students are talking with court personnel, it is often helpful for them to prepare questions before visiting the court. Students can write questions that relate to information they already have learned about the courts, or satisfy their curiosity about an issue they may have seen in the media or other source. You may give students some guidance on their questions by providing models or steering them away from inappropriate questions about pending cases.

How should teachers follow up with students and court personnel?

Teachers should reinforce learning from the court experience through continued classroom activities on the judicial system. Whenever possible, refer to what students learned while at the courts to help them make connections between the court and their classroom experiences.

It is also important to follow up with a note of thanks, preferably signed by the students, addressed to those who helped make the experience meaningful. Before leaving the court, be sure to get the names and addresses of those who set up the visit or spoke to the students.