

## **Verdict Is In: Teachers Enjoy Day Of Justice**

By DAVID SOMMER The Tampa Tribune

Published: Apr 4, 2008

NEW PORT RICHEY - Some teachers chewed gum, and the superintendent talked in class, but when it was over Thursday everyone agreed Pasco's first Justice Teaching Day was a resounding success.

Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis of the Florida Supreme Court missed his calling as an educator, 36 middle and high school history and social studies teachers ruled.

"We all believe Justice Lewis is the consummate teacher, and I believe he is the consummate citizen" for traveling here to lead them through a lesson plan about courts and the Fourth Amendment, said Paula Lesko, social studies coordinator for Pasco schools.

Lewis' presentation capped a day of seminars in which local judges and a prosecutor explained how civil and criminal cases progress through the system.

Studies show most Americans don't know the three branches of government, and many don't know the U.S. Supreme Court can overrule the president, Lewis said during a break.

"College kids know more about political correctness than about the justice system," he said.

Lewis explained how judges must follow the law and not their personal opinions. For instance, he voted as a judge to approve the wording of a proposed state constitutional amendment to protect pregnant pigs. As a citizen, however, he voted against the amendment.

"We are in the same boat you are" as teachers who must follow the rules, Land O' Lakes High School government and law teacher Robert Marsh told the chief justice.

To illustrate his lesson on the Fourth Amendment protection "against unreasonable searches and seizures," Lewis initiated mock hearings on a questionable search, based on an anonymous tip, in which a gun is found on a student waiting for a school bus.

Land O' Lakes High American government teacher Karen Coss was a reluctant draftee when Lewis told her to argue for the defense.

"Me and my brand-new law degree," Coss quipped before arguing that police lacked probable cause to search the boy. The Fourth Amendment requires that search warrants be based on sworn and detailed evidence of probable criminal activity.

Anthony Gentile, a former sheriff's deputy who teaches law and world history at River Ridge High, acted as prosecutor and argued the officers had a right to frisk the student to ensure their safety.

By the time the class was over, the teachers attending had ruled by a nearly 2-1 margin that the gun could not be used as evidence.

The U.S. Supreme Court agreed with them, Lewis told the group. The top judges in the land found that the tipster could have set up the student, that the student did nothing to arouse suspicion, and there was no precedent for the search under existing law.

**Reporter David Sommer can be reached at (727) 815-1087 or [dsommer@tampatrib.com](mailto:dsommer@tampatrib.com).**