

Ask Teaching Tolerance



Q. Recently I have seen references to the term “hidden curriculum”? What is a hidden curriculum?

Broadly, the phrase hidden curriculum refers to the lessons that students learn in schools that aren’t part of the formal lessons or objectives. These can be intentional (such as embedding social emotional learning into daily lessons) or unintentional (such as replicating or reinforcing existing social structures—often inequitable ones).

An example of an intentional hidden curriculum is selecting an activity that requires students to practice listening skills—even if listening is never mentioned in the directions.

An example of an unintentional hidden curriculum is a school culture that fusses over the football team but never acknowledges classroom success—sending the message that physical prowess is more important than academics.

Now that you know the definition, ask yourself, “What hidden curriculum am I teaching?” Once you become aware of the values and judgments that underly your behaviors and choices, you can cultivate a hidden curriculum that promotes inclusivity and elevates all students.

If I see a school resource officer (SRO) doing something out of line to a student, what is the best course of action?

If the activity is taking place in a public school or on public school grounds, you are acting as both a citizen and a school employee. It may not be possible to interrupt the activity, but you are in a position to raise the propriety—or legality—of the SRO’s actions with your administration.

Ideally, you would record the incident. This type of documentation could help the student and—depending on the

outcome of the incident—potentially help the police work more effectively in the school. (Be sure to assess for safety before you whip out your camera phone!)

It is currently legal to film on-duty police in all 50 states as long as the filming is not conducted in secret. A police officer or SRO may tell you to stop filming or try to detain you. Knowing your rights in that situation is important for you and your students. Involve them in researching laws about what police can and cannot ask bystanders to do. This type of authentic learning can show students that educators have questions and concerns about school safety too.

If you aren’t able to film the incident—either due to logistical or safety reasons—your account as an outside observer is still important. Bring your documentation to school and police officials. If the student was arrested, consider providing your testimony to the student’s attorney. And, most importantly, get informed and involved about disciplinary policymaking in your school and district.

For more information on how to support responsive school discipline, see the new Teaching Tolerance guide, *Code of Conduct*. (tolerance.org/code-of-conduct)

ASK TEACHING TOLERANCE!

Need the kind of advice and expertise only Teaching Tolerance can provide? Email us at editor@tolerance.org with “Ask TT” in the subject line.