

An Insider's Secrets to Developing a Relationship with your Local School District to Generate a Growing Universe of Prospects, Part 1

Many instructors have wanted to teach a martial arts course in their local public schools for several legitimate reasons. A professional relationship with your local schools can generate more students (as a feeder program for your school), increase revenues, and improve your school's visibility in your community as you develop a "celebrity" status. Often, the policies of schools and school districts are a mess of red tape and legality that, to you, can appear to be insurmountable barriers to teaching martial arts in your local schools. This report will provide real-life examples and present the strategies that instructors, including myself, have used in various states to overcome those barriers and create a win-win situation for students, local school officials and you and your school. Some methods have been more effective than others, but you may find an approach that is right for your situation.

Options and Who To Approach

Based on my experience and research, you can choose from two major options with sub-categories to offer professional martial arts instruction to your local schools or district. Each sub-category listed below includes the titles of the school officials that I recommend you first contact to present your program.

1. Extra-Curricular Activities

- After-School Program (in the school)—School Principal
- Clubs—School Principal
- Physical Attributes improvement course for specific high school athletics (such as improving the power of a tennis backhand, trapping skills

for football players to pass their man, quicker footwork for basketball players, or increased overall assertiveness for the girls' soccer team)—Specific coaches

2. In-School Programs

- Short-term Martial Arts Program (introductory course) as part of the school's current physical education course—PE/Gym Teacher
- Full-time Martial Arts Program (in the school) offered to students for either elective credit or physical education credit—School Principal

In most cases, the administrators and educators listed above should be your first contacts because they simply have immediate control of individual environments within schools.

A teacher may need to obtain approval from his or her principal, while a principal may need approval from the superintendent; and the superintendent may need the approval of the school board. Based on my experience, the principal is the key player. He or she works to obtain approvals, or stops the process from happening.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Next, I want to provide you with some additional detail about your two options: extra-curricular activities and in-school programs.

An **after-school program**, operated in the school, may be the easiest way to bridge the gap between your local academic schools and your private, professional martial arts school. Many academic schools already offer extended day programs to keep students safely

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in the school until their parents arrive to drive them home. In most cases, administrators, parents and even students would welcome an additional, well-run program that includes the many benefits of martial arts training.

Start the approval process by preparing and presenting a benefits document to the principal of an elementary or middle school/junior high school. Your document should list the specific benefits your target school's students will receive from your program. You will also want to schedule a parents' meeting early in the year and outline your program to them. Your goal is to make the parents positive and powerful partners.

You should be able to charge a fee for your after-school program and develop a daily, weekly, monthly or yearly payment schedule. It is a good idea to charge less for your after-school program than the standard tuition at your martial arts school. This distinguishes your regular classes as more professional and of higher quality and results—and more desirable.

In some cases, you may be charged a fee to use the gym, lunchroom or commons area within the school, but it is usually nominal, compared to revenues from student fees. Schools charge a fee to create legal separation between them and you and avoid lawsuits should an injury occur. If you plan to have your after-school-program students wear uniforms, then order them the most cost-effective uniforms on the market. Save the higher end uniforms for your pro shop.

School clubs are more popular at middle schools/junior high schools or high schools. Most clubs have an adult advisor who is a member of the school's faculty or staff; however, he or she may be willing to allow an outside expert in a particular field to become an advisor of a club.

Expect to be fingerprinted and have the school run a background check (any professional that works with youth should be willing to be investigated). Clubs are not generally huge moneymakers, but it is appropriate to charge "fees" or "dues" to cover the cost of activities, T-shirts or equipment. A club, if sanctioned by the school, does not have to pay to use school property. Being involved with a school club is an excellent method to promote interest in the martial arts and direct interested students to the nearest martial arts school (yours).

Both after-school programs and school clubs, once established, are great teaching opportunities for apprentice instructors. They'll gain the necessary experience to know how to manage students and teach the curriculum.

A **physical attributes improvement course** could be of interest to an academic school's athletic coaches and their players, once you can show how martial arts training can improve physical skills and enhance each athlete's contribution to the team effort. Make sure you describe your teaching abilities as being martial arts-based and that you have no intent to take control of the general training and coaching of the team.

You can offer to contribute your time at no cost, during regular team practice session, or your program can be (with the support of the coach) a seminar or camp during the off-season at your school for a cost. I know of martial arts instructors who have been successful training athletes in specific skills for their sports:

- Basketball: Distance recognition with stick training (at long range). Faster cat-like reflexes with "knife" sparring.
- Water Polo: Motor skills, moving through water and straight-arming.
- Volleyball: Improved jumps with plyometrics. Training of surface areas for spiking, setting and digging.
- Wrestling: Increased experience and understanding of MMA ground positions and how they relate to high school wrestling rules.

In-School Programs

Short-term Martial Arts Programs can take many forms. A physical education teacher may agree to have you teach (under his or her direction) a portion of the class. A standard school year is divided into semesters, quarters or terms. A teacher usually sub-divides these time periods with the teaching of various units, which consists of a series of lessons. For example, during a school term, a PE teacher may cover the fundamentals of warming up, stretching, tennis, basketball and volleyball during a term in a general PE skills course. Your introductory unit on the martial arts could easily fit into such a curriculum outline, which is one less

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unit the PE teacher must find or develop for his or her students.

I advise that you offer to teach an introductory unit at no charge, but it would give you access to many students who could potentially become paying customers at your school. Another option is to offer to teach a single class or all of the PE classes during one school day. The PE teacher may have to obtain the principal's approval for this option.

A **Full-time Martial Arts Program**, operated within a public school, is a great benefit to the students and you because it is consistent and continues throughout the school year; and it's a constant reminder to students and parents of your commercial school, the benefits of its program and your positive image in the community. The easiest way to introduce and teach a full-time program is to be a licensed teacher in your state or district; however, it is not absolutely necessary, depending on where you reside.

In part two of my Black Belt Marketing Report, I'll provide some examples of full-time martial arts programs and review topics, such as licensure and qualifications, obtaining approval, uniforms and the use of training weapons in public schools.

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