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CENTERPIECE

Class Exposes Students To Justice System

By MEGAN WILLIAMS Daily News-Record 2 hrs ago



On the Road Collaborative youth leader Jacqueline Fortunato is questioned by Skyline Middle School student Oscar Romero during a mock trial in the Rockingham County Courthouse on Wednesday evening.

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HARRISONBURG — It may have “mock” in the title, but the mock trial put on Wednesday by students from city middle and high schools had many elements of the real thing.

Held in the Rockingham County Courthouse, the trial was presided over by Judge William Eldridge, and heard by community members who made up the jury.

Hosted by after-school program On the Road Collaborative, the event was a chance for students to get a look at the justice system up close and personal.

This is the fourth year that On the Road Collaborative has presented the opportunity for students. The organization aims to help middle and high school youths on a path toward college or a career.

The mock trial is the culminating learning showcase of the 10-week legal career enrichment class led by volunteer local attorneys, and is a partnership with Discovering Justice, a Boston-based nonprofit youth organization.

“The biggest thing is to give them exposure to career opportunities and to see themselves in a potentially different role,” said Grant Penrod, a lawyer with the firm Hoover Penrod. Penrod has been helping prepare students for the mock trial for all four years that it’s been held.

Along with exposing students to different career paths, the class also gives students an actual look inside the legal system, which is often misrepresented in television and film, Penrod said.

Seventh-grader Andrea Robles was on the defense side of the mock trial and said that the class and preparing for the trial was “stressful but fun.”

“I learned more about being a lawyer,” Andrea said.

Two mock trials were presented Wednesday night. The first, “Walker v. Providence,” was put on by middle school students and involved the repercussions of alleged bullying.

As a senior at Maple High School, the fictional Tracy Walker suffered serious injuries as a result of being bullied by Elizabeth Johnson, another student.

In the mock suit, Tracy claimed the bullying was witnessed by but not acted upon by teacher Sarah Providence. Tracy claimed that this failure caused her to lose a track scholarship, and she was seeking \$90,000 in damages.

Opening remarks were given by the plaintiff's attorney that claimed the teacher witnessed multiple instances of bullying, particularly at prom. The defense claimed that Providence was unaware of these instances during an event attended by hundreds of students.

Each side presented their witnesses before the "jury" came to a verdict.

After the middle school students presented their trial, high school students presented the case of "Gaines vs. Genovia School Board," where the plaintiff claimed his Fourth Amendment rights were violated by a principal who searched him while investigating graffiti.

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