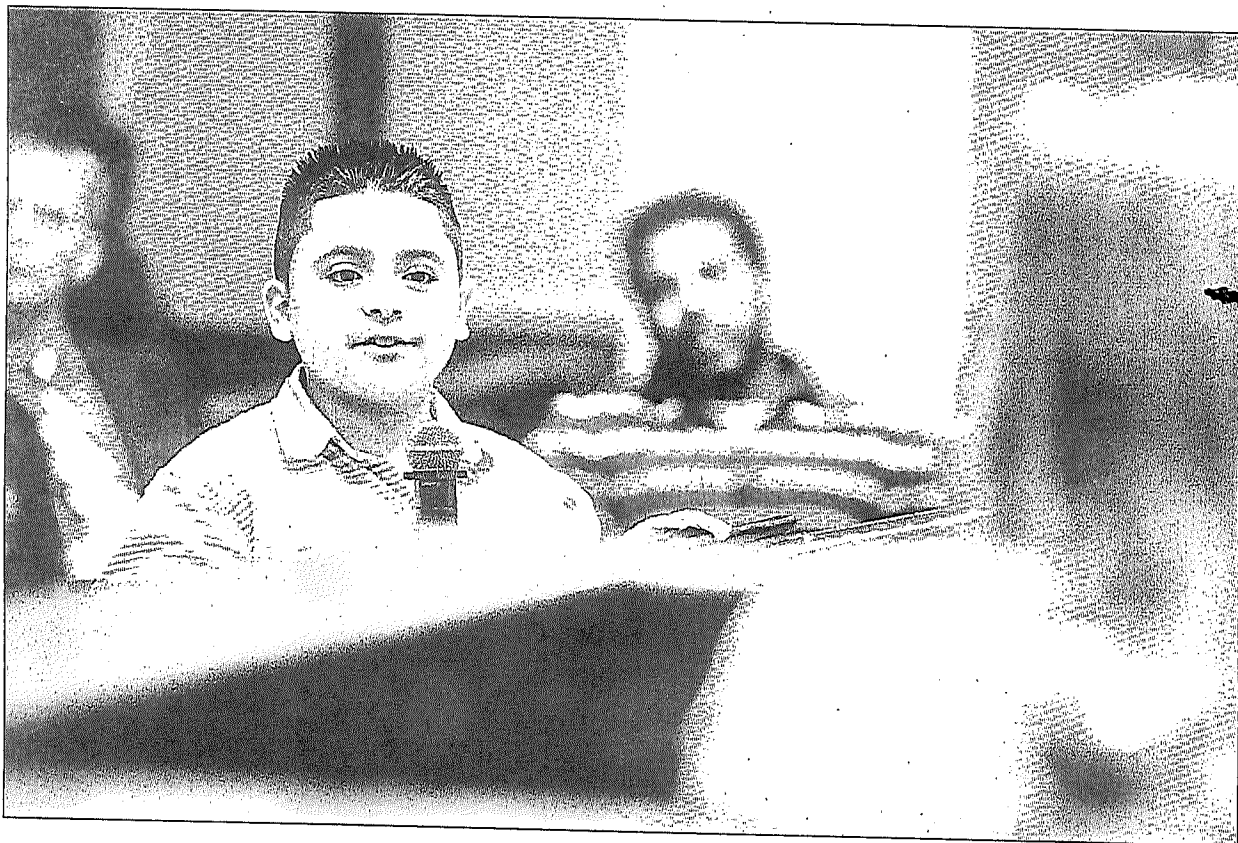


From Classroom To Courtroom



Photos by Daniel Lin / DN-R

ABOVE: Mikey Paniagua, a Skyline Middle School sixth-grader, cross-examines a witness on behalf of the plaintiff during a mock trial Tuesday in the Rockingham County Courthouse. The event was presented by On the Road Collaborative. BELOW: Jayla Walker, a Skyline Middle School fifth-grader, holds up a T-shirt that was the subject of the mock trial on Tuesday.



Daniel Lin / DN-R

Margot Zahner, Skyline Middle School assistant principal, is cross-examined during the mock trial on Tuesday.

Kids Exposed To Careers

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"If they didn't have exposure to law, they wouldn't know they ever wanted to do it."

Mikey, who was an attorney for the plaintiff, said he wants to pursue a law career.

"I've wanted to become a

lawyer ever since I started seeing cases on TV," Mikey said. "It's something that I always thought was cool. It's something important and something I would like to do."

Contact Nolan Stout at 574-6278 or nstout@dnronline.com

A Taste Of Justice

Middle-Schoolers Hold Trial In Rockingham Court

By NOLAN STOUT
Daily News-Record

HARRISONBURG — Isaac Jones did not deserve to be suspended for his "fight the power" T-shirt.

Attorneys for Jones, a student at Hartwell High School, argued Camille Smith, whose mother is a police officer, had an inherent bias when she complained about his shirt to school administrators.

"You are more worried about rising violence than the normal student at Hartwell High School," said Mikey Paniagua, 11, a sixth-grader at Skyline Middle School. "Others will not hear about rising violence and police violence on a normal basis."

Mikey was one of 12 students from Skyline Middle School to participate in a mock trial at the Rockingham County Courthouse on Tuesday. In the scenario, Jones sued the school's administration, saying his suspension was unjust.

The "trial" was a project by On the Road Collaborative, which provides after-school programs centered on career opportunities. About 90 students are involved in the program, according to the organization's founder and president, Brent Holsinger, who is also a member of the Harrisonburg School Board.

During the 10-week program, local attorneys provided information about trial skills and court procedure. The attorneys taught the students about court but allowed them to di-



rect the trial.

"All these questions these students asked were questions they wrote," said Grant Penrod of Harrisonburg firm Hoover Penrod. "Those opening statements and closing statements were things they wrote. They weren't things the lawyers did. They weren't from a script."

Judge William Eldridge praised the students' work.

"I was very impressed with all the questions on direct examination," Eldridge said. "We need more attorneys like you all."

The case was centered on Jones' suspension for not removing his "fight the power" shirt, which school administrators had said was disruptive.

The defense argued the shirt, which had lyrics from a fictional song, kept others from learning.

"Issac is a disruptive student," said Sara Guiton, a fifth-grader and

"defense attorney."

Jones was portrayed by Avery Coleman, who works with the organization. His attorneys said wearing the shirt was his right under the First Amendment.

"The lyrics let Isaac express himself," said Lindsey Ruvalcaba, a fifth-grader.

The jury sided with the plaintiff, stating the school's principal did not have sufficient evidence that the shirt was disruptive.

Career Opportunities

Holsinger said the organization offers 12 projects to give students exposure to different types of jobs, including photography, aviation, Web design and cooking.

The organization began offering after-school programs at Skyline Middle in September.

Holsinger said the organization allows students to think about career paths they might not otherwise consider.

"They can start to discover what those passions are," Holsinger said.

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I was very impressed. ... We need more attorneys like you all.

Judge William Eldridge

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Record
(Harrisonburg), VA

Wednesday,
December
16th, 2015