

FEATURE ARTICLE

“You Can Make A Difference”

Rene Sandler, Chair, School Education Committee

A year ago I was appointed to Chair the Bar Foundation's School Education Committee. The Committee partners with Montgomery County Public Schools to provide cutting edge programs to parents and students. A new year is ahead of us and we again need volunteers. I challenge you Bar Members, Judges, Law Clerks, Prosecutors, Public Defenders, Solos, Firms to give of yourself in terms of both a commitment to our Bar program and in dedicating just a few hours of your time to share in educating students and parents.

The School Education Committee has two essential components: the Youth Initiative and Speakers Bureau. The Youth Initiative works directly with the Montgomery County Public Schools ("MCPS") Division of Family

and Community Partnerships to make formal presentations to students and parents through the MCPS Parent Academy.

We have previously presented programs on topics including gangs, internet safety, youths and drunk driving, effects of drunk driving on insurance and driver's licenses, drugs, introduction to the legal system, and the juvenile justice system. The Parent Academy is a nationally recognized model which provides support for parents with children in the school system. The underlying goal of the Youth Initiative Project is that through educating parents there will be better communication with their children which will likely result in a reduction of juvenile crime, drugs, alcohol, and truancy. Education and awareness are critical for parents facing a

multitude of issues with today's youth. The Parent Academy schedule will be set for the entire 2008-2009 school year in early Fall so please contact me immediately to volunteer.

The Speakers Bureau is the second component of the School Education Committee. The Speakers Bureau is responsible for placing speakers on a variety of topics with a school that makes a request. This past year requests included forensics workshops, introduction to the legal system, how a bill becomes a law, law enforcement topics, mock trials, motor vehicle administration issues, and collateral consequences of drunk driving offenses.

Speakers are also scheduled in schools throughout the county in the Spring for the MCPS annual Career Day. Career Day requires placement of dozens of individuals in elementary, middle and high schools to speak about a career in law. Students are not only interested in becoming lawyers, but want to know about employment in the courthouse, as a paralegal, legal secretary, law librarian, courtroom clerk and other jobs in the legal system.

This last year I volunteered to speak at my elementary school alma mater, Cresthaven Elementary School for Career Day. I looked forward to return as a professional to a place that I had left almost forty years ago only dreaming about my future. The students were so excited to have someone as a speaker that went to their school. I shared stories about cases that I have handled, and gave words of encouragement to young people excited at the prospect of working in our profession. The students and staff appreciated that I took the time out of my schedule to come to speak to them about pursuing a career in the legal profession.

Volunteering for a Career Day takes 2 hours of your time per year. That's it. Give of yourself and you can make a difference in the lives of young people growing up in today's world. Contact me today to volunteer for the Youth Initiative Project and to be included in the Career Day and Speakers Bureau for Public Schools database.

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