

Pinkston High School Students Learn About Voir Dire, Law and Life Lessons at Haynes and Boone Event

By Rachel O'Donnell, Tim Newman | December 13, 2018

Day'cha Rakestraw enjoys watching different courtroom trials on YouTube and "Criminal Minds" on TV. She wants to become a lawyer so she can help other people understand their rights. Her classmate Maricruz Castaneda is partial to "Law and Order: Special Victims Unit" and wants to become a lawyer so she can give back to the community.

"I feel like being a lawyer lets you look out for others, and you can impact many lives," said Castaneda, a senior at L.G. Pinkston High School.

The young women were among 10 students from Pinkston High who participated in a Texas Young Lawyers Association (TYLA) program at Haynes Boone's Dallas office on Wednesday afternoon. The program, called "What Do Lawyers Do?," featured a panel discussion with young lawyers, a Q&A session, a mock jury selection, and a mock opening statement.

The students learned new phrases such as "voir dire," "burden of proof," "beyond a reasonable doubt," and "preponderance of evidence" during the event and got a glimpse of life as a lawyer. They also learned that many of the lawyers in the room did not know what direction their careers would take them when they were in school.

"I am the first lawyer in my family. I didn't fully understand what lawyers did until I started law school," said Partner [Tim Newman](#), a panelist who helped organize the event. "But I saw being a lawyer as a platform for being active in the community and serving others, and that's what drew me to the profession."

As treasurer of TYLA, Newman is doing his part.

"This is a great event that we did for the first time last year with Pinkston through Haynes Boone's Pipeline Program," he said. "We typically have a panel discussion plus a practical session, and it gives these students a chance to see what lawyers do and to ask us any questions they have about getting to law school and practicing law. It's really rewarding to be a part of it."

Several of the students said they have started applying for colleges and are interested in pursuing law.

"I have known I want to be lawyer since I started high school," said Jared Cooper, a Pinkston senior. "Civil litigation sounds the most interesting to me."

The event helped reinforce his interest in a career in law. "It was really interesting hearing how the lawyers got to where they are now," Cooper said.

The young lawyers also offered advice and words of wisdom to the students: "You can really take life one step at a time, and it will work out and you will end up where you're supposed to be," said Lindsey Vanden Eykel, TYLA director and a lawyer who practices family law at KoonsFuller, P.C.

Britney Harrison, TYLA vice president and a lawyer who practices family law with GoransonBain Ausley, PLLC, said she loved being in the courtroom environment and watching trials when she interned with the District Attorney's Office. Harrison said she enjoys her practice because it allows her to serve as counselor and advocate to individual clients going through emotionally charged life changes.

Aaron Burke, TYLA chair and a trial lawyer at Fee, Smith, Sharp & Vitullo LLP, urged the students to take classes that interest them. He also stressed the importance of striving for good grades in school, on the SAT, and on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT).

"Treat studying like a job because that grade will determine whether you get into a school or whether you get a scholarship," Burke said.

Andy Jones, TYLA director and a personal injury lawyer at Sawicki Law, added: "Pick something you're interested in studying in school regardless of whether you go on to to be a lawyer. Foreign languages are very helpful."

The students were part of L.G. Pinkston High School's law practicum. As part of the law practicum, Pinkston High students will visit Haynes Boone for eight weeks to learn about the practice of law and the business of operating a law firm. The partnership is an important component of Haynes Boone's pipeline programs that aim to help develop a diverse network of young people interested in pursuing legal careers.

Haynes Boone will host another event with Pinkston students from the [P-TECH](#) program on Monday, Dec. 17.