

A chance to change the world for the better

BY DAMON VERAS - HAMMOCKSMIDDLESCHOOL.ORG

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Last October, my school, Hammocks Middle School Pre-Law Magnet, participated in Ethical Governance Day for the first time. Throughout the day we had speakers from the offices of Harper Meyer Attorneys at Law, as well as the executive director of the Miami-Dade County League of Cities, Richard Kuper. The almost 300 students in the Pre-Law Magnet program took part in presentations and activities throughout the day.

The attorneys guided us through mock trials, and the presentations included real-life examples of how ethics play a role in everyone's lives. One of the things I liked best was when Mr. Kuper handed out material about becoming involved in what happens in our community, including a handbook that elected officials must follow in order to be ethical representatives of the people. This was particularly important to me because I see myself going into public office one day. This desire is what brought me to the Hammocks Middle Pre-Law Magnet program.

At Hammocks, we study justice, ethics and conflict resolution. It was fascinating to see how what we are studying is used in real-life careers. The Ethical Governance Day speakers answered our questions and made us think like junior attorneys and future politicians. I never felt that they were talking down to me. During one of the

mock trials that took place in our school's courtroom, an attorney from Harper Meyer gave us evidence and arguments from an actual civil case that had gone to trial in another state.

Part of the class stood in as jurors while the others took the judge's and attorneys' roles. We had to stay within the parameters of the law to argue the case and got to see how rules exist within the justice system for a reason.

Last year, our school also hosted the Justice Careers Expo, and we got to work with attorneys from the law offices of Greenberg Traurig and representatives from the Sweetwater Police Department. This year we will be visiting the Gerstein Justice Building throughout the year to observe actual trials and to work with judges and attorneys.

All of these experiences and the incredibly enriching knowledge that we gained from the Ethical Governance Day activities have led my classmates and me to start picturing ourselves in future careers.

I took the excitement I felt after Ethical Governance Day and I got involved in a political campaign when I met a candidate for Congress at Hammocks during a Coffee and Conversation event he hosted on campus. I never would have seen myself involved in a political campaign were it not for Mr. Kuper's words, which made such an impact in my life. He said that we all had the chance to change this world for the better through public office and by leading ethical lives. I want to explore this idea even more when I visit Washington, D.C., this year during our school's Close-Up trip.

In the meantime I will continue to perfect my speech and debating skills, while continuing my work on the campaign. We are all looking forward to participating in this year's Ethical Governance Day and learning more about ethics and how moral codes of conduct are part of everyone's lives.

Maybe one day I will be the attorney or politician inspiring a group of students to dedicate their lives to public office.

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