



Eyes to **THE FUTURE**

WORKING WITH CONSTITUTION HIGH SCHOOL
TO BOOST CIVICS EDUCATION AS WELL AS
DIVERSITY IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

By Virginia G. Essandoh

When the Philadelphia School District first floated the idea of a civics and social studies magnet school in the city's historic district during a meeting at the National Constitution Center, Mary Gay Scanlon was in the audience. It didn't take long for Scanlon, a longtime public and civics education advocate and Ballard Spahr LLP's pro bono counsel, to connect the dots.

"A pipeline partnership between Constitution High and Ballard seemed like a perfect fit – for them and for us," said Scanlon. "Ballard was looking for ways to promote diversity in the legal profession. What the district was proposing was a school right in our backyard that was designed to attract students with a natural affinity for law and civics."

Six years later, that partnership has grown to include a formal mentoring program, job shadowing, a mock trial team, paid internships, an annual scholarship and dozens of community service projects. Several members of the firm assist with curriculum development or serve on the school's advisory board, including Scanlon and Justin Klein, who leads Ballard Spahr's securities practice.

Ballard Spahr offers an annual scholarship to a student expressing interest in a career in law. The firm even went so far as to host the junior prom in its atrium in the Mellon Bank Building, complete with crepe paper streamers.

"As is so often the case in situations like these, we get more than we give," said Ballard Spahr's Arthur Makadon, the firm's former chair. "The project is well conceived and it plays to our strengths as a law firm. At one time or another, most of

the Con High kids have been in our office. I am looking forward to the day when we hire our first graduate."

When they get there, they'll be very well prepared.

More than 1,200 students applied for 100 slots at Constitution High School for American Studies last September, according to

Dr. Thomas Davidson, the school's principal. The number of applicants has risen steadily each year since the school opened its doors at 7th and Market streets in 2006. The college preparatory, citywide admission school has a student body that is 85 percent minority. It sits across the courtyard from Graff House, the building where Thomas Jefferson penned the Declaration of Independence. The curriculum is designed to capitalize on the city's historical resources to teach all of the social sciences through the lens of the American experience. The school has three key instructional themes: democratic deliberation, active citizenship and knowledge of history.

"Our mission is to create the next generation of leaders. Knowledge of the law is a very big part of that," Davidson said. "Our partnership with a firm like Ballard exposes the kids to so many things that will be important to them in life. The lawyers and staff there have really gone the extra mile. I'll give you just one example. The student who received the Ballard scholarship last year went to Pace University in New York. Justin Klein is friends with Pace's president. On the first day of school, the president found her and took her out



Constitution High is a citywide admission school with a student body that is 85 percent minority. The school opened in 2006.

"DEMER SAE . LEGES - TIME FACTA.
LIBERTAS . HAE . TANDEM . EMERGUNT"



Ballard Spahr LLP built a mock trial courtroom at Constitution High that was dedicated and named for retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, shown here with Constitution High students and U.S. Court of Appeals Judge Marjorie O. Rendell.

to dinner to discuss her career and educational goals. Those types of experiences make a difference.”

One important lesson is how to comport yourself in a professional setting. Ballard Spahr attorneys coach the mock trial team and have helped students purchase suits so their appearance would be as professional as their arguments. And when the firm won a “Meeting the Challenge” Award from DuPont Legal in recognition of its legal skill and dedication to diversity, the firm used the money to construct a mock trial courtroom at the school. The courtroom was dedicated in 2008 by retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, for whom it is named. Justice O'Connor, a longtime advocate of civics education, took the time to judge a mock trial presentation and meet with students to discuss her decision to become a lawyer.

Another noted figure who addressed the students recently was former Gov. Edward G. Rendell, who returned to Ballard Spahr as special counsel after leaving public office. More than 100 students recently filtered through the firm's hallways as part of the school's job shadowing program and Gov. Rendell made a surprise appearance during lunch. Despite the unexpected

nature of the governor's appearance, the students were ready to pepper him with legal questions about their latest mock trial exercise.

“Being a lawyer, even training for a career in law, gives you skills you can use throughout your life,” Gov. Rendell told the students. “You have to prepare your arguments in advance, be ready for every possible surprise. It's about strategy and making sure your clients are one step ahead of everybody else.”

The realities of that preparation, however, were a bit surprising for some of the students.

“The thing I learned is that not all lawyers go to trial and make objections,” said Daniel Lorenz, an 11th-grader from Roxborough. “The lawyer I shadowed was writing contracts for buildings and we did a conference call. It was pretty serious business.”

“I learned that you actually have to think about all the different sides of a case so that you can make a good argument,” said Kyah Hawkins, a

17-year-old 11th-grader from West Philadelphia. “Lawyers on TV are always running into the courtroom and fighting. The woman I shadowed must do a lot of reading because she had a ton of books and papers in her office. I think you have to be

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Almost every student who attended the most recent job-shadowing event at Ballard Spahr is interested in pursuing a career in law. And that is very good news to Anthony Gay, associate general counsel at Exelon. Exelon and GlaxoSmithKline lawyers partner with Ballard lawyers to provide advice and guidance to Constitution High students using innovative Chronus Mentoring software that Ballard Spahr purchased for the sole purpose of mentoring the students.

As part of that program, mentors and students communicate regularly via email but also have several face-to-face meetings with students throughout the school year.

“Diversity is absolutely very important to us. We want our matters staffed by diverse teams and we hold ourselves to the same high expectations,” Gay said. “Diversity is about what we do today but it’s also about preparing for the future. It’s

important for us to make sure that young people from diverse backgrounds can benefit from our experience.”

That sentiment was echoed by Ballard Spahr Chair Mark S. Stewart.

“We try never to forget how fortunate we are as lawyers, and the culture of this firm compels us to use some of that good fortune for the benefit of others,” Stewart said. “The result, especially when we spend time with the students of Constitution High, is that we get back more than we give. This is true not only for the individuals directly involved, but also for the firm as a whole. We improve the lives of young people in Philadelphia, enhance the long-term future of the legal profession, and work side-by-side with our best clients. You just cannot beat that.” ■

Virginia G. Essandoh (essandohv@ballardspahr.com) is chief diversity officer at Ballard Spahr LLP.



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Rod Wittenberg
Director, Web Archiving Solutions
RWittenberg@reedtech.com
(215) 441-6479

www.ReedArchives.com



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