

Rochelle Middle School Event

August 13, 2007

When a group of at-risk students from Rochelle Middle School in Kinston, N.C., recently visited Groom Law Group offices during a field trip to the nation's capital, they were surprised to learn how much time and effort it took to become a lawyer. But Groom attorneys were also surprised—by the students' inquisitiveness about what lawyers do.

"I learned that there's a significant amount of interest in the law and legal careers even at middle school age," says Groom attorney Alexander Ryan. "Even young people are fascinated by what lawyers do and want to become lawyers."

The early August event was part of Groom's ongoing diversity outreach efforts, to encourage young people to consider legal careers—although unique, as the firm normally focuses on high school and college-aged students.

"It was a great opportunity to do something we're already doing—reaching out to the community to educate young people about the law and employee benefits work, through high school, college and law-school-aged students," says Ryan, who serves on the firm's Diversity Committee. "Here we had a chance to work with younger students who are not yet in a position to go to law school but can start working hard and studying hard so they can prepare for professional education."

But the core message Groom attorneys and staff delivered to the Rochelle Middle School students was the same one they deliver to college-aged students:

"With discipline and willingness to study hard and prepare, people of all sorts can become attorneys, from whatever social and economic backgrounds," says Ryan. "There's room for anyone who is willing to work. Law school, we told them, involves much of the same kind of work they now do in school: reading, studying and taking tests."

The students, sixth to eighth grade boys, participate in the Pride of Rochelle Mentor Program, where they receive one-on-one attention from community members both on- and off-campus. At Groom offices they met

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with Ryan, attorney Christina Crockett, legal secretary Gia Montserrat and legal assistants Shedon Williamson and Kevin Darling.

Darling, who played football at Penn State University and recently tried out, unsuccessfully, with the Washington Redskins, talked to the boys about having a backup plan if their professional sports careers don't work out.

On their part, the boys were surprised to learn that lawyers do so many different things, says Ryan, and that there are so many opportunities for attorneys in non-criminal contexts.

"They were a great bunch of kids," says Ryan, "bright, inquisitive and enthusiastic, and we enjoyed their visit."

Although working with middle school students was a departure from other Groom diversity efforts, it exemplifies the firm's commitment to expanding inclusion in the law of people whatever their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, or geographic and educational background.

"Our clients are becoming increasingly diverse," says Ryan. "It's important that we reflect that and work to recruit talented and diverse candidates."