

Local Schools



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The Constitution Project

SEPTEMBER 22ND 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Poplar Bluff, Missouri - A new class has been started at Poplar Bluff High School that partners with local industry professionals to take students through the process of investigating a mock crime, holding a trial and reporting about the proceedings.

The 19 students—selected based on academics, school citizenship and interest level—will be judged on merit in the disciplines of journalism, trial advocacy and crime scene investigation, with the highest scoring teams going on to compete against other schools before the Missouri Supreme Court.

The Constitution Project kicked off on Wednesday, Sept. 6, with PBHS joining a dozen other high schools, 250 students total, in Jefferson City to hear an overview from state leaders, including the Missouri First Lady, Dr. Sheena Greitens.

“I can remember as a student, experiential learning was the most powerful kind of learning because discussing and acting out a concept is more relevant than a teacher lecturing at you,” said social studies teacher Mitch Davis, who presides over the class. “Of course we all have to lecture, but this is a project-based learning class that teaches your rights as a citizen under the Constitution by acting those principles out.”

The founder of the program is Texas County Associate Circuit Judge Doug Gaston, who recalled that many young people were interested in exploring careers in forensic science and pathology after the crime drama TV series CSI came out, so he decided to “meet the students where they were,” and share his passion for the Constitution.

“The biggest thing for me is to teach them that the reason the Constitution matters is the Constitution keeps you free,” the honorable judge said. “You can become what you’re meant to become in life because we don’t have a government that oppresses us, and that’s because the Constitution is not just a document, it protects our rights.”

The class was instituted in Poplar Bluff by Superintendent Scott Dill who, at his previous post, was the head of the first school district in Missouri to participate with Gaston in 2011. The Constitution Project began as a club at Houston Schools, expanding the following semester to all the schools in the county, and going statewide two years later. Last year, Missouri Congress passed a law allowing the curriculum to shape a credit-bearing elective.

“One of the opportunities in changing school districts as a leader—and regions of the state—is the opportunity to poach best practices,” Dill stated. “I’ve never been above looking across district lines to determine what will work best for our kids, without reservation, and making it our own. There’s a perception that districts are in competition, and that may be true in athletics and things like that, but ultimately our public schools stand united toward one common goal – and that’s ensuring our schools are working for our students.”

Pictured are PBHS students simulate how a bill becomes a law in the House Chamber of the Capitol.

Photo and article submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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