

The jury is in! Mackay Elementary kids tops on rule of law

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Award-winning fifth grade students from Mackay Elementary School traveled to Newark at the start of July to meet United States Magistrate Judge for the District of New Jersey André M. Espinosa and staff.

The students were invited to the courthouse when they were selected as winner of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit's Rule of Law Essay Contest. Eight winners were selected from more than 175 entries.

"I am so excited and proud that our students' essay was selected," Mackay Elementary principal Brenda Yoo told *Northern Valley Press* on July 5. "This was such an incredible experience. They met with Judge Espinosa and his staff; and explored the courtroom, sitting in the jury box, witness stand, and attorney tables."

The Law & Public Policy Essay Contest for 5th and 6th grade classes focuses on civics, citizenship, and the concept of the rule of law and encourages stu-



Law essay contest certificate winners, left to right, are Mackay Elementary School's Joel Brahimilari, Maya Meth, Alex Xu, Grace Liao, Olivia Ho, Megan He, and Victoria Vemay. They're standing with United States Magistrate Judge for the District of New Jersey André M. Espinosa in his courtroom in Newark. Christine Corless photos.

dents to participate in dialogue on state, national, and global legal issues.

The contest requires students to combine their research and writing skills to increase their under-

standing on a law or policy matter and advocate for a position.

This year, students were asked to answer, "What does the rule of law mean to you and to our country?"

The Third Judicial Circuit is composed of the U.S. Court of Appeals as well as the Federal District Courts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"Our courts are integral"

According to Judge D. Brooks Smith, who chairs the Courts, Community, and Rule of Law Committee overseeing the contest, "It is important, now more than ever, that the citizenry realize that our courts are an integral part of the community. An understanding of what we do as the third branch of government in promoting the rule of law will help students

appreciate the importance of our independent judiciary."

Mackay's winning essay writers included fifth graders Joel Brahimilari, Olivia Ho, Megan He, Grace Liao, Maya Meth, Victoria Vemay, and Alex Xu, who traveled to the courtroom on June 23 for a small reception. Each student was presented with a certificate and personal thank you for their participation and excellent work.

"This was a unique and exciting opportunity for the students in our Gifted and Talented program," said Heidi Chizak. "All of the students were passionate about the topic and thrilled when the winning news arrived. We look forward to participating in the contest again next year!"

For more information about the essay contest, visit the Third Circuit Court of Appeals at ca3.uscourts.gov or call (267) 299-4306.

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