



Through the Courts4Civics initiative, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit promotes civics education in our schools and communities. Read on to find out about ongoing initiatives and to discover how you can get involved!

Constitution Day Student Essay Contest Winners Celebrated





On September 26, 2024, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit recognized the winners of the 2024 Fourth Circuit Essay Contest during a Constitution Day program at the Lewis F. Powell, Jr. Courthouse in Richmond, Virginia.

On the 70th anniversary of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), students were asked to share their thoughts on the question: "Has the decision in *Brown*, viewed through the lens of 2024, achieved its purpose of ensuring equal opportunity in public education?" The contest was open to middle school and high school students from the five states within the Circuit, and the court received 275 entries. (Photo above: Judges and essay contest winners; photo left: Linda Brown, 1952, AP Photo)

"There is still a lot of progress to be made in order to fully realize the potential that diversity in schools has for the future of the country and our democracy."

-Kennedy Grams, 1st place high school essay

The program started with a theater-style reading performed by the middle school contest winners, five students from Albert H. Hill Middle School in Richmond, Virginia, and two Fourth Circuit law clerks. These performers played the roles of several historical figures involved in *Brown v. Board of Education*, including Linda Brown and Justice Thurgood Marshall, while images of those figures were displayed on screen for the audience.

[Click to read more about the contest winners.](#)

Civics Day in Charlottesville

Judges, attorneys visit 500 students across several middle, high schools



On October 8, 2024, six federal judges and three attorneys visited five schools in and around Charlottesville, Virginia. Together, the panelists interacted with more than 500 middle and high school students. This "Civics Day," coordinated by Courts4Civics, was held on the eve of a workshop for judges hosted by the Federal Judicial Center. Judges and attorneys followed the guidelines of the ["Just Ask a Judge"](#) program, which involves judges and attorneys sharing about their personal career paths, their day-to-day work, and concepts including the Rule of Law. Courts4Civics plans to coordinate additional civics outreach days in conjunction with future conferences and workshops.

"The students' questions were thoughtful and gave me a lot of faith in the future of our country."

-Circuit Judge Barbara Milano Keenan

At Buford Middle School, teacher Thomas Oakley observed that his school has a large population of students from the Middle East, including female students who had not earlier attended any formal schooling. Mr. Oakley and other

teachers observed the “awe and wonderment” from these students when they learned that their speaker, Judge Stephanie Thacker, was a female jurist. The teachers observed that Judge Thacker’s presentation made a “lasting impact” on the students in attendance.

[Click to read the full article about this Civics Day Event](#)

Learning to Listen, Speak Respectfully *Students Practice Skills in Civil Discourse*



On November 12, 2024, about 30 high school students from Alexandria City High School participated in the Civil Discourse and Difficult Decisions program, a national initiative of the U.S. Courts. The program involved students participating as attorneys and jurors as they engaged in a simulated legal proceeding focused on a fictional set of facts. Students were asked to focus on developing and adhering to a set of "ground rules" for engaging in civil debate with one another.

During the three-hour program, the students first were welcomed with a hot-topic icebreaker: should students be allowed to wear pajamas to school? The students expanded upon the question and turned the dial up by asking: should teachers be allowed to wear pajamas? The students held firm to their beliefs but engaged in open minded conversations that drew on their personal experience to explain their views on this "hot button" issue, before beginning the court simulation.

When asked what civility skills they gained from the program, students shared that moving forward they would “listen more and not be so one-sided,” and be “interested [in] seeing everyone’s viewpoint and how everyone [can] be respectful.” The students noted that civility goes beyond words, commenting that

“positive body language,” and “carrying [ones]self with professionalism,” are also skills to practice when engaging in civil discourse.

[Click for more about this Civil Discourse event.](#)



Judges engage with students at law schools

This fall, several judges from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit connected with law students at various events.



- In September 2024, a three-judge panel comprised of **Chief Judge Albert Diaz**, **Judge James Andrew Wynn**, and **Judge Stephanie D. Thacker** heard oral argument at the North Carolina Central University School of Law in Durham, North Carolina. (Photo above: Judge Wynn with law clerks and NCCU staff/students.) [Click to read about the Circuit's **special sessions**](#) and the history of "[circuit riding](#)."
- In October 2024, **Judge Roger Gregory** participated in a Civil Discourse & Difficult Decisions event with the William & Mary School of Law in Williamsburg, Virginia. The panel of judges included Judge Gregory, Magistrate Judge Shaniek M. Maynard and Judge Robin Rosenberg, both from the Southern District of Florida. Judge Rosenberg, along with Judge Beth Bloom, [developed the Civil Discourse program](#) for U.S. Courts. Please email civics@ca4.uscourts.gov if you would like help hosting a Civil Discourse program.



- In November 2024, **Chief Judge Diaz** participated as a judge in the second-year intramural moot court competition at the University of Georgia School of Law in Athens, Georgia. (Photo left).

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About Courts4Civics

An initiative of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, Courts4Civics promotes civics education in our schools and communities, to create learning opportunities and to increase public understanding of how courts work to resolve disputes in our society and to protect our constitutional rights.

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