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HOME NEWS STORY VBA PUSHES FOR 'RULE OF LAW' PROGRAM IN EVERY MIDDLE SCHOOL

VBA pushes for 'Rule of Law' program in every middle school

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The Virginia Bar Association continues its drive to make the Virginia Rule of Law program part of curriculum of every Virginia middle school.

With funding from the Virginia Law Foundation, the VBA is offering 10 grants of \$2,500 each to local bar associations

that adopt the program.

Under the program, lawyers join with teachers to teach middle school students the importance of law in American society.

Starting as a pilot project in the public schools in the Roanoke Valley, the Rule of Law course now has been introduced to a total of 43 school divisions, reports Roanoke lawyer G. Michael Pace, one of the project coordinators. About a dozen school systems already have taught classes on the rule of law.

The grant money will help spread the project's reach, Pace said. "It certainly is a huge benefit to the VBA Rule of Law project," he said. "It provides funding for some things that local bar associations might otherwise be paying for when they adopt this project."

A memo directed to local bar leaders asks them to form standing rule-of-law committees to work with school representatives on the project. Bar associations are urged to have their project leaders meet with teachers at the end of the summer or just after school starts to review the materials and pick dates for the classes. Volunteer lawyers and judges then can be recruited.

The memo being circulated to the local bar associations includes a four-page application (due by Aug. 13) to seek funding from the Virginia Law Foundation. "A committee has been formed to receive and consider the applications, so there is a process for approval," Pace said.

There is a wealth of materials to support the education effort, Pace said. His project partner, retired educator Tim Isaacs, recently has updated the Rule of Law website at ruleoflaw-vba.org.

"We have all sorts of teacher resources including a list of a hundred works of literature - fiction, nonfiction and poetry - all annotated to the rule of law," Pace said. "If teachers go on the website and they just borrow that, they have a curriculum."

Pace said the literature list is a benefit for anyone associated with the law. "That's a lifelong reading list for just about anybody who's interested in it," he said.

The VLF, which backed the Rule of Law project from its inception, has committed to continue funding the program for the next three years, Pace said, although no funding amounts are committed.

The Virginia Department of Education has lent support, as well. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright plans to encourage support from local school divisions in a memo to superintendents later this month.

The VLF grants will help local bar associations pay for copies of classroom materials, host training sessions, provide "The Law Rules" wristbands for students, and generate media attention.

Pace notes the project provides a public relations opportunity for local bars. "Stories about your lawyers and judges working with teachers to give students a better understanding of the rule of law are a powerful way to publicize your good community service work," Pace wrote in his memo to bar leaders.

Pace seems energized by his role as a promoter of the project in the legal community. "It is rare to have the opportunity to work on something that meets with positive reinforcement at every turn," Pace said. "This certainly has been the case with the VBA Rule of Law project."

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