

Partners Unlimited Bulletin Board

A Public Education Legal Services Project
of the Washington Lawyers' Committee
for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs

Fall 2003

ACTIVE IMPERATIVE – The Case for Latin Grammar In a D.C. Public School

by Alan P. Vollmann

I was one of the “drill sergeants” in the five-week program to prepare incoming freshman for the rigorous academic program at Banneker, a D.C. public high school across the street from Howard University. For three years, I have been one of the Latin taskmasters, and as a part-time faculty member during the regular school year, I have witnessed this program’s success in setting the high standards of achievement Banneker demands.

My return to teaching came about in large part because my law firm, Holland & Knight, strongly encourages attorneys to be involved in the D.C. Public Schools. I was a 60’s generation idealist, who opted for teaching in the inner city

(Continued on page 4)



Alan P. Vollmann from Holland & Knight teaching his Latin class at Banneker Senior High School.

Park View 5th Graders Explain Their World

“Many of the problems that children like me have today are because adults just don’t get it,” explains Park View student, Shellon Farrier, in her prize-winning essay about Understanding Fifth Graders. “Although adults were once children, when they get old they forget the feelings of children,” says Shellon. She believes that adults “need to understand children better and remember that sometimes it is very hard to be a child. Some problems we have are bullies at school, some children wanting to fight with us, getting and keeping good grades, peer pressure. School is not an easy life.”

Shellon was one of 46 fifth graders who participated in the 8th annual essay contest that **Reed Smith** sponsors for Park View fifth graders every year. At the school’s graduation, she was

(Continued on page 5)

CHECK THE BOARD

Iris’ Intro	2
One Firm’s Story	3
Serious Students	1, 5
Principals’ Perspective	6-7
Celebrations	8
FYI	10
School Partnership List	11

IRIS' N T R O



IRIS J. TOYER
Project Director, Public Education Legal Services
Project, Washington Lawyers' Committee

On September 25, we held our most recent Principals and School Partners Luncheon at Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer and Feld. The school principals in attendance were asked to talk to us about being a principal in the current environment.

What, you say, is the current environment? Unfortunately, we begin this year where we left off last year in the midst of a budget upheaval, a reduction in local school resources (i.e., supplies, staff, etc.) and the suggestion that vouchers will make a difference!

What we learned—and perhaps already knew—is what our principals shared with us that afternoon. I think that we all knew that many of the students in our public schools are from low-income

families and do not have the range of opportunities that their middle- and upper-income peers are afforded. We knew that experience and opportunity give children a better chance to succeed. We knew that many of our children cannot depend on their family unit to provide the support that they need to be ready to learn. We knew that dollars do make a difference.

So what did we learn? The lesson of the afternoon was that the negative picture that is painted of our public schools is often one-dimensional and fails to provide the complexities of the portrait that we call public education—particularly in D.C.

So what do we do? As you read through the principals' comments you will learn the role that area firms are playing in making a difference in our schools. Surprisingly, the investments are simple but the dividends for both the schools and firms are tremendous.

Our lead story, *ACTIVE IMPERATIVE*, is a sterling example of just how a law firm/school partnership can enhance the education that students receive in our public schools. Alan P. Vollmann from Holland & Knight has combined his legal training and experience to help students at Banneker Senior High School prove to themselves how smart they are.

Mr. Vollmann knows what I hope we all know. Our kids are smart and just need the opportunity to show it! Are you up to the challenge?

Iris

Iris J. Toyer, Director
Public Education Legal Services Project

ONE FIRM'S

T O R Y



STANLEY J. SAMORAJCZYK
*Partner, Akin, Gump, Strauss,
Hauer & Feld*

We launched our partnership with John Tyler Elementary School seven years ago. This was a new pro bono community service activity for the law firm.

Our first step was to consult with Joan Kelley, the principal, and key faculty members at the school. We soon learned how much the dedicated faculty was accomplishing with limited resources in the face of so many needs for the students. A substantial percentage of the students live in nearby public housing.

With the guidance of the principal and faculty, we have created a number of programs to supplement the existing ones – everything from installing our surplus computers in classrooms and networking them, providing supplies, reading program tutors, field trips, an end-of-the-year Fun Fair, and special education events, to hot meals for PTA meetings, which have dramatically boosted parental participation.

Our partnership program is a rewarding experience for everyone. The teamwork between our attorneys and staff and Mrs. Kelley's faculty contributes to a better learning experience for Tyler students. Once you roll up your sleeves and work in the schools you'll love. The partnership does terrific things for the students. You get to know and work closely with hard-working faculty members. The partnership is also terrific for your firm. It boosts spirit, morale, and provides a heightened sense of giving back to our community.

Occasionally, people at the firm tell us, "I want to be involved, but because of my trial schedule, extensive business travel, or family obligations, I don't have time to go to the school on a regular basis." We formed a tax-exempt corporation so that those who cannot roll up their sleeves and contribute their time may participate by taking out their checkbook and making a financial contribution. These contributions supplement the monies provided by the firm for our school's partnership program.

Our partnership program enjoys the active support of the firm's management, an essential ingredient of a successful program. Each firm in a school partnership can work to identify and then address the specific needs of its school. These needs vary widely from institution to institution. The result is a rewarding experience for all involved and a better education for the students of the D.C. Public Schools.

S E R I O U S

T U D E N T S

Banneker Students Find Latin A 21st Century Language (cont'd)

over fighting in Vietnam. Just before I decided to pursue a legal career and get married, I had started teaching some of my dysfunctional kids Latin and was amazed that they learned the language faster than I did in a college-prep high school. I left teaching after several years for a more lucrative career in the law. Over time, I have gradually returned to the classroom. “Unfinished business,” I explain to my law partners.

I have taken the opportunity over the years to be a participant observer in a number of programs in the D.C. public schools. Having met a lot of smart, but turned-off students, I remembered well the kids I taught right out of graduate school in the early 70’s. When I learned that Banneker may have a need for another Latin teacher, I had my teaching credential transferred from California to D.C. and offered my services, intent to continue my Latin experiment as a way of raising standards. Latin seemed like an easy way to prove to kids how smart they are. Since there is no expectation for a Latin curriculum except that everyone seems to think you must be smart if you study the language, the idea seemed fool-proof. There is no way students can say they are “bad at Latin” since they’ve never had it and have no idea what to expect. Furthermore, I never met a kid who didn’t want you to show him how smart he was.

Bobby Johnson, the Latin teacher for several years at Banneker, became my mentor. Unlike me, Bobby was young,



Alan P. Vollmann from Holland & Knight outside Banneker Senior High School where he teaches Latin.

cool, funny, spontaneous, and African American. But like me, he believed in young people and asked far more from his students than they thought they could do. He could prove his success. Just count the many awards and certificates his students collected each year after taking the National Latin Exam as well as a very difficult national mythology exam designed for seniors rather than freshman. For my first Summer Institute, Bobby and I were team teachers, and he suggested that we conduct class for the first week entirely in Latin. Bobby felt that we should conclude the five-week program by teaching the students how to read the opening lines of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in Greek and the famous prologue of the *Aeneid* in Latin – in perfect dactylic hexameter, of course. Even I was skeptical, but Bobby insisted.

(Continued on next page)

Banneker Students Find Latin A 21st Century Language (cont'd)

The incoming eighth-graders thought we were crazy, but that didn't deter us. After our first day of class, I overheard a boy with a heavy dose of attitude (that's "*hybris praecox*" to classicists reading this) tell one of his classmates that he had figured out how to get kicked out of our class. He never accepted his challenge, but he did come up to me with the following question during the last week of class: "Does the caesura fall before or after *profugus* in the second line of the *Aeneid*?" – a prosodic quibble any Vergilian scholar would be happy to discuss. Bobby proved to me my own hypothesis.

How do you get a bunch of rowdy eighth-graders conditioned for a rigorous academic program, motivated to dance to the rhythm of the foxtrot and the dactylic hexameter? It's simple: peer pressure. Incoming students to Banneker quickly learn that acting stupid is uncool. Student leaders are part of the summer faculty. They make it clear to the "recruits" that a lot will be expected from them – not only by the faculty, but by their peers. The "Banneker family" is a phrase that quickly becomes a part of each student's vocabulary. Achievement, leadership, and community service are the primary educational objectives that the students teach each other in their classes, study groups, and extracurricular activities.

I recently read an article in *The Onion*, a parody of *The New York Times*, that argued that the lowest common denominator was dropping precipitously. At Banneker, one could say that the lowest common denominator is constantly rising since the "A" grade a student received in the last grading period is the minimum expectation for the next. Grade inflation is not a problem at Banneker. Teachers feel they are wasting a student's time if an "A" comes too easily. In fact, Banneker students are quick to complain that a teacher is not covering material quickly and adequately or is failing to meet the sometimes higher expectations of the students. I even had to talk a couple of students out of taking the AP

(Continued on page 7)

Reed Smith Awards Prizes For Park View Essays (con't)

honored with a certificate and a first-place cash prize of \$200. Second and third-place winners received prizes of \$150 and \$100.

The essay of second-place winner, Markeda Gilliam, emphasizes that fifth graders live in two worlds. "The first few things parents and people need to know is that we are not little kids like people think.... We are independent people coming up in a crazy world like everyone else.... We are up to facing more difficult challenges. It's all a part of growing up. Also, there is a very important thing to know about us, that we are in a way still children and the bad things as well as the good will make us curious. We do need parents to guide us away from drugs and the other horrible things."

The essay contest is the final activity of a year in which Reed Smith promotes literacy in a variety of ways. During the year, every fifth grader attends a Power Lunch at the firm. The students leave the lunch with a goody bag full of items that promote literacy—a book, Reed Smith pencils, and a journal for writing.

Markeda Gilliam, one of the winners of the Park View Essay Contest, sponsored by Reed Smith.



PRINCIPALS'

ERSPECTIVE

Joan Kelley,
Tyler Elementary School



*Joan Kelley, Principal
Tyler Elementary School*

At Tyler, we are struggling to reconcile fewer resources with no reduction in the demands placed upon us. We are doing

our best to carry out our responsibilities with a

shrinking budget and some promising but very inexperienced teachers. Supervisors from central administration are spread so thin that I am having to spend a significant amount of time working with new teachers instead of focusing on other important responsibilities.

We are surviving because of our partners. The budget cuts that we experienced would have eliminated field trips for our students were it not for



Principals with law firm attorneys and staff at the first School Partnership Luncheon of the school year. This luncheon hosted by Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld, focused on the perspectives of the four principals whose comments appear on this and the following page.

Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld. The tutoring and reading the firm does is very important. We lean on them. They are helping us through. I have colleagues who are very jealous because we are able to rely on our partners. What Akin Gump does for us is critically needed, and we truly appreciate it.

Erasmo Garza, H.D. Cooke
Elementary School



*Erasmo Garza, Principal
H.D. Cooke Elementary
School*

When we deal with a lot of low-income children, the problem is not that they cannot learn. They can learn, but they have not had the opportunities that middle-class kids have

had. In order for our kids to succeed, we have to give them the same opportunities. That means they should have access to art and music and camps. Through those socializations, they develop different skills, and their vocabulary increases. So that when you talk about a cow, they have seen one. Our kids have not seen a cow. So when they see it in reading, what are they going to associate it with? We do not have enough money to take them out to see a cow.

Our kids are as talented as any. Given a level playing field, they would be able to compete with anybody. It is our job in the inner city to make that playing field as level as possible so that our kids can succeed.

(Continued on next page)

Polly Brown, Stevens Elementary School



*Polly Brown, Principal
Stevens Elementary
School*

My children come from all over the city. A significant number are from middle-class homes. My children are looking for challenges, and my parents have very high expectations. We get few Title I funds (federal money that schools receive based on the number of low-income students they have). So when the budget cuts come they hit really hard. We have cut as much of the supplies and personnel as we could. We have cut out a lot of activities from our budget. So we look to our partnerships to help us with these kinds of things. And we really appreciate our volunteer tutors.

I urge everyone to take advantage of the opportunity to connect with a child.

There is something so disarming about a relationship with a child. When you connect with children, you connect with the importance of public education and what it means to the advancement of our young people.

Burnell Holland, Wilkinson Elementary School



*Burnell Holland, Principal
Wilkinson Elementary School*

From my perspective, the school is the only urban institution that is living up to its responsibilities. The churches have basically gone to the suburbs. Recreational opportunities are very limited. Our kids cannot rely on the kind of family unit that sustained us when we were growing

up. We have grandparents and great-grandparents who are trying to raise children. As a result, we have placed more and more responsibilities at the schoolhouse door. Now we have to make sure these children have proper health care. We have to feed them. If that is what it takes, then that is what it takes. But our government should not turn around and say, "By the way, I'm going to cut your budget 20%."

I cannot spend much energy thinking about the unrealistic and unfair expectations we face. It is my job to go into the building and be positive and to motivate a beaten-down, demoralized work force and say, "We can do it anyway."

I think partnerships can have a tremendous impact. During my years at Park View, our partnership with **Reed Smith** was a great relationship, and I understand it is continuing. I think the key is that we forged our relationship at the top between senior people at the firm and the school administration. I am new at Wilkinson and to the partnership the school has with **Foley & Lardner**. But I am enthusiastic about the possibilities of this relationship.

Banneker Students Find Latin A 21st Century Language (cont'd)

Exam in Vergil this year because the other AP tests they were taking were much more important for them.

Banneker can brag about standardized test results, college admissions, academic competitions, and the number of AP and IB courses the students complete successfully. That's fine, but it is not the most important thing about Banneker. The part of the curriculum that can never be measured is the pride and self-confidence of the students. The teachers and staff can't take all the credit for that. Behind every Banneker student, there is at least one adult — a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or guardian — supporting the student's efforts.

Banneker succeeds because its teachers and staff know that all young people want to be respected, challenged, and shown the way to a successful, happy adulthood. Success is not just measured in course grades and test scores, but by the confidence that self-knowledge can instill in a

(Continued on page 10)

CELEBRATE

E L E B R A T I O N S

Law Firm Volunteers, Students Enjoy Good Times



Attorneys from Fulbright & Jaworski enjoy a June picnic with the Macfarland Middle School students they have mentored throughout the year.

As the school year comes to an end, law firms sponsor a variety of celebrations for students at their partner schools. Attorneys at **Fulbright & Jaworski**, for example, marked the close of the 2002-2003 school year by treating the Macfarland Middle School students they mentor to a cookout and games at Hains Point. That popular location was also the site of the picnic **McDermott, Will & Emery** sponsored for the second grade at Bowen Elementary School.

The partnership volunteers from the **D.C. Federal Courts** entertained the entire second grades at J. O. Wilson Elementary School. This celebration featured face painting, games, refreshments and educational prizes.

The **Greater Washington Area Chapter of the Women Lawyers Division of the National Bar Association** or **GWAC** marks the closeout of the school year with a unique annual celebration for

fifth- and sixth-grade girls at Malcolm X Elementary School. The girls and their escorts are treated to a dinner dance in the school's cafeteria, decorated for the occasion by teachers and staff. Music is provided by a DJ, and the students enthusiastically compete in a dance contest that is one of the highlights of the event. Another highlight is the punch and cake served toward the end of the evening. Each student receives a framed picture to remember the evening. And to remember their year of tutoring and enrichment activities, they are given t-shirts and certificates of completion.



Bowen Elementary students get their faces painted at the end-of-the-year party provided by volunteers from the D.C. Federal Courts.

Taking Part In Graduations At Partner Schools

A number of law firms make a point of having a presence at the graduations of students at their partner schools. This past June 11 was particularly significant for the partnership between Marie Reed Elementary School and **Fannie Mae's Corporate Legal**

(Continued on next page)

Department, because it was graduation day for the first group of second-grade students tutored by volunteers from Fannie Mae.

Fannie Mae provided special certificates for the students who had been tutored and awards for sixth graders who had excelled academically. Marie Reed recognized the legal department's contributions to the school by presenting a plaque and silver bowl to Fannie Mae officials.

Volunteers from **Levine, Sullivan, Koch & Schulz** attended the graduation of the H.D. Cooke Elementary students they had tutored and mentored for three years. To commemorate the important day, the law firm volunteers presented their students with silver engraved picture frames and took pictures of the volunteers and their students at the graduation. One of the volunteers, attorney Ashley Kissinger, is enjoying getting to know another H.D. Cooke student this fall. Ashley, however, is continuing to work with her first Cooke student, Nelsis Madonado, even though Nelsis has moved on to middle school.

For eight years, Park View Elementary School's graduation has been the culmination of the essay contest sponsored by **Reed Smith**. During the ceremony, the winners are announced, and they read their essays. Cash prizes are also awarded at that time.



Graduation Day: Ashley Kissinger, from Levine, Sullivan, Koch & Schulz, with H.D. Cooke graduate, Nelsis Madonado and Nelsis' brother, Kevin.

Students Create Holiday Cards For Law Firms



This design for a Foley & Lardner holiday card was drawn by Steven Williams, a third-grade student at Wilkinson Elementary School.

The December holiday season is an important time for law firms and their school partners to celebrate together. **Foley & Lardner**, paired with Wilkinson Elementary, is one of many firms that celebrates the season by sending out a holiday card created by a student from its partner school.

Last fall, Foley & Lardner invited the Wilkinson students in the three third grades that came to the firm for weekly tutoring sessions to participate in a competition for the best card design. The young students enthusiastically submitted 75 entries. These entries were displayed in the firm's largest conference room, and at the end of October, attorneys and staff cast their votes for the best designs. The vote tally produced three winners. Foley & Lardner was so impressed with the quality of the artwork that the firm invited all the young Wilkinson artists to a luncheon honoring the winners. During the luncheon, the first-, second-, and third-place winners received savings bonds for \$500, \$400, and \$300.

FYI

Recycle, Redeem Raise Money For Your School

Holland & Knight is turning old cell phones and empty cartridges into money for Banneker High School. If you make sure your partner school is registered with the FundingFactory, your firm can do the same. Once your school is registered your firm can participate as a supporter of your school. The FundingFactory will send your firm boxes for the old cell phones and cartridges. As the boxes get filled up, UPS will take them away at the FundingFactory's expense. Every old cell phone or cartridge will earn points for your school. These points can be turned into cash or redeemed for products in the FundingFactory's catalog.

For more information, go to www.fundingfactory.com or call 1-888-8237.

Taste-Off Prizes Go To Five Firms

The Fourth annual *Cooking for Kids Bake Sale* the morning of June 16th raised money for six schools. That afternoon, the quality of the pastries made picking the *Taste Off* winners a real challenge for the judges who were professional chef Carla Hall and the Washington Lawyers' Committee's taster extraordinaire, Rob Demske.

The top winner in the Pie Division was a key lime pie baked by Keisha Gary of **Dickstein, Shapiro, Morin & Oshinsky**. A pecan pie from **Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw** and an apple pie

from **Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson** took second and third places in that division.

Cranberry shortbread cookies, created by Judi Isenburg of **Steptoe & Johnson** took first place in the Cookie Division. Second place in that division went to **Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw's** entry, triple chocolate chunk cookies. Lemon cookies from **Dickstein, Shapiro, Morin & Oshinsky** came in third.

First place in the Cake Division went to Paula Jones of the Committee for her coffee cake. A fluffy-top chocolate cake from **Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson** and a four-layered chocolate cake from **Weil Gotshal & Manges** won second-and third-place honors.



The winning Taste-Off entries.

Banneker Students Find Latin A 21st Century Language (cont'd)

young person – particularly where the peer group adopts those values as its own. Each student has his own unique set of talents and quickly learns that peers as well as teachers and other adult role models can help one find his strengths and weaknesses.

The "It's Academic" bulletin board, with pictures of some of the successful teams Banneker has assembled over the years, says it all: "They can because they think they can." Of course, all the Latin students know that those words are a rough

(Continued on back page)

PARTNERSHIPS

Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld

Tyler Elementary School

Arent Fox Kintner Plotkin & Kahn

Randle Highlands Elementary School

Arnold & Porter

Garrison Elementary School

Baker & McKenzie

Payne Elementary School

Beveridge & Diamond

Birney Elementary School

Bracewell & Patterson

Van Ness Elementary School

Covington & Burling

Cardozo Senior High School

Crowell & Moring

Garnett-Patterson Middle School

D.C. Office of Corporation Counsel

R.S. Terrell Junior High School

Dickstein, Shapiro, Morin & Oshinsky

Ellington School of the Arts

Fannie Mae's Corporate Legal Dept.

Marie H. Reed Learning Center

Foley & Lardner

Wilkinson Elementary School

Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson

School Without Walls

Fulbright & Jaworski

Macfarland Middle School

Greater Washington Area Chapter -

Women Lawyers Division -

National Bar Association

Malcolm X Elementary School

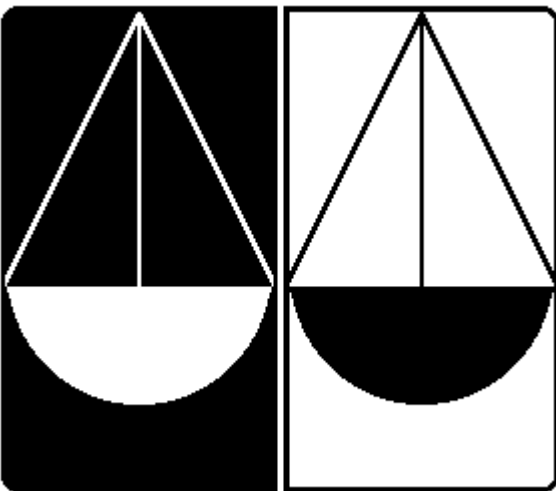
Health Right Inc.

H.D. Cooke Elementary School

Ferebee-Hope Elementary School

LaSalle Elementary School

Lincoln Junior High School



F I R M S C H O O L S

Holland & Knight

Banneker Senior High School

Cleveland Elementary School

Howrey, Simon, Arnold & White

Bancroft Elementary School

Levine, Sullivan, Koch & Schulz

H.D. Cooke Elementary School

McDermott, Will & Emery

Bowen Elementary School

McKenna Long & Aldridge

Stevens Elementary School

Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw

Gage-Eckington Elementary School

Patton Boggs

Francis Junior High School

Pepper Hamilton

Stanton Elementary School

Piper Rudnick

Bruce Monroe Elementary School;

Law Scout Program

Eastern, Dunbar and Duke

Ellington Senior High Schools

Reed Smith

Park View Elementary School

Sidley Austin Brown & Wood

Thomson Elementary School

Stephoe & Johnson

Montgomery Elementary School

Sutherland, Asbill & Brennan

Bell Multicultural Senior High School

Swidler Berlin Shereff Friedman

Adams Elementary School

U.S. Attorney's Office for the

District of Columbia

Amidon Elementary School

U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit

J.O. Wilson Elementary School

Washington Bar Association -

Young Lawyers' Division

Banneker & Ballou Senior High Schools

Weil, Gotshal & Manges

Seaton Elementary School

Williams & Connolly

Dunbar Senior High School

Winston & Strawn

Kamit Institute for Magnificent Achievers

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**Banneker Students Find Latin A
21st Century Language (cont'd)**

translation from the fifth book of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Like the ragtag group of Trojans making their perilous journey across the Mediterranean to found the Roman Empire, Banneker students are reminded daily that they too are destined for great things.

Alan P. Vollmann is a part-time Latin Instructor at Banneker during the school's Summer Institute and the regular school year. When he is not teaching at Banneker, he is a commercial real estate partner at the law firm of Holland & Knight LLP in Washington. His clients are pleased that he has always required associates to delete Latin from their legal writing and to write in plain English.

**2003-2004
PARTNERSHIP DATES**

January 13 Partnership Luncheon
April 20 Partnership Luncheon
June 14 5th Annual Cooking For Kids
Bake Sale and Taste-Off

Partnership Luncheons will be at
Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld

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