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University luncheon kicks off 2nd annual 'Lunch with a Lawyer'

By CAROLYN STEEVES

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CHARLOTTE — 60 rising 8th-grade students from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools met Wednesday with the lawyers who will act as their mentors this year.

The Lunch with a Lawyer program kicked off with a luncheon at Johnson C. Smith University. Mentors, mentees and school officials met for the first time and shared a lunch while listening to various speakers.

Guest speaker Anthony Foxx told the crowd about his journey from being a CMS student to becoming a lawyer and eventually a Charlotte city councilman.

He offered the students three pieces of advice — be determined, be open to new people and new situations and remember the people who are counting on you to succeed.

"You have a remarkable opportunity to find a path for yourselves," Foxx said. He added that even if that path does not lead to the law, he hopes the students learn lessons from their mentors that they can use for the rest of their lives.

Andrea McGlinn, an attorney with Rayburn, Cooper and Durham, is one of the mentors this year, her first year with the program.

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"I think this is a great program," McGlinn said, "I think any kind of outreach program for children and middle-schoolers is great."

McGlinn is new to the Charlotte area and wanted to get involved with the community.

"A lot of students don't have access to a lawyer, they don't have anyone in their family who is a lawyer and so it can be kind of intimidating," said McGlinn, who grew up without access or exposure to lawyers and found that she had to "feel her way" through law school.

McGlinn feels that it would have been nice to have had someone to ask for advice. She hopes to

cultivate that sort of relationship with Kayla McCollum, a student at Davidson IB Middle School who McGlinn will mentor throughout the year.

McCollum is very active in her school. She is an honor roll student, a member of the National Junior Honor Society and class president, though she notes that she will have to run for re-election this year.

She was selected by the teachers at her school to participate in the program and is honored to be among the selective group of students.

"It's always been something that I've had interest in," said McCollum about becoming a lawyer, "So maybe this will help me to decide if this will be my career path."

Like most 8th graders, McCollum still isn't sure what she wants to be. Also on the list is a career as an event coordinator or an entrepreneur.

The Lunch with a Lawyer program was created by the Mecklenburg County Bar's Special Committee on Diversity. The co-chairs of the committee are George Hanna and Todd Brown, who helped to create the event.

The students meet with their lawyer once a month and eventually will visit their mentor's workplace and shadow them through a workday. The program hopes to encourage diversity in the legal profession.

Superior Court Judge Albert Diaz is a member of the Special Committee on Diversity — along with other members, he helped to create and development the program. The program is intended to create and promote diversity in the legal field.

The hope of the committee is that in 2019 — the year that these students would graduate law school — there will be a new, diverse crop of lawyers.

"That's what the diversity committee is all about, is to provide pathways and access to younger people who would not otherwise have access to achieve access in the legal profession if that's what they choose to do," Diaz said. ☐



MEETING WITH MENTOR: Deanca Crouch, a student at J.T. Williams Middle School laughs with her mentor Luciona Johnson, an attorney at Hunton & Williams law firm.



Mecklenburg Times photos by Carolyn Steeves

ADVICE TO STUDENTS: Anthony Foxx, Charlotte city councilman and an attorney, talks to the group about the legal profession and offers his advice for success in their futures.