

## **NJ Hispanic Bar brings mentoring to AC high school students, by Julio Mendez**

**Julio Mendez For The Press**

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Recently, 13 students attending Atlantic City High School had the opportunity to speak one-on-one to judges and lawyers about their dreams and goals in life. Each volunteer mentor spoke about their life journey and how education and perseverance impacted their lives.

The American Dream Pipeline mentoring program sponsored by the New Jersey Hispanic Bar Association began this year at Atlantic City High School. The mentoring program was established in 2013 at the Passaic High School. It is currently operating in three high schools in the state.

The program meets once a month over the course of the school year. It provides students with one-on-one mentoring and guidance from local judges and lawyers — all volunteers wanting to give back to the community and to make a positive difference in the lives of students.

The role models work with students and encourage them to achieve their goals. The message is simple: Do the right thing, work hard, take one step at a time, don't give up and follow your dreams.

The program has been immensely successful over the last 10 years, with lawyers and judges giving back to help students in underserved communities.

The HBA-NJ has established a scholarship endowment for graduating students entering law school as well as college. It is about making a positive difference. Last year alone \$50,000 in scholarships was awarded to students attending college and law school.

Abby Webb, the current NJ HBA president, and a partner in the Hill Wallack law firm in Red Bank, drove two hours to attend the meeting to demonstrate the commitment of the organization for the program.

Three local judges attended the meeting as well. Each volunteer will take on one or two students as mentors.

The program is coordinated with ACHS, and so far, 13 students have signed up. Each month, the students meet with their mentor at the Atlantic City High School Library.

The agenda for meetings includes discussions regarding the college application process, the mentor's experience in law school, college careers, future employment, and any advice the mentor may have for the student.

A school official or teacher attends each meeting and serves as coordinator for the high school. Kerri Harvey and Keri Williams are the school coordinators and they have provided strong support for the program.

The NJ HBA attorney coordinator is Maria Cortes. Cortes is a lawyer with the Philadelphia law firm Holland and Knight, and a graduate of Atlantic City High School, Stockton University and Rutgers Law School.

Mentoring sessions include presentations on life skills, college admissions, community involvement, juvenile justice, the risks of addiction, and social media. The program will also sponsor trips to different law-related events, NJ HBA meetings, the courthouse to watch court proceedings, as well as visiting local colleges and law schools.

Several participating students will be invited to attend the annual NJ HBA scholarship gala, where they will meet judges and attorneys from around the state.

The Pipeline program provides each student with insights as to how to achieve their career goals despite the challenges they may face and guides them toward obtaining a college education.

The most important aspect of the Pipeline pProgram is to provide the students with the inspiration to reach for their ultimate goals.

The goal of the American Dream Pipeline Program is to show students that they too can achieve their American dream.

During its 34 year history, NJ HBA members have a proven commitment to make a positive difference in the community. What better way to accomplish the goal than to inspire, mentor and challenge students to stay in school, work hard and get an education?

Following the initial success of the program, it has continued to expand statewide. The Atlantic City Pipeline Program has been a year in the making, and Atlantic City High School is the first school in South Jersey to introduce the program.

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