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**LOCAL NEWS**

## HMSHS students learn to plan careers early

By **Kathie Colgrove**  
NCR Reporter *Friday, May 21, 2010 3:51 PM EDT*

Eighth grade students got a reminder May 6 that it is never too soon to plan their careers.

Fourth Judicial Circuit Public Defender Matt Shirk visited eighth grade students at Hilliard Middle-Senior High School, stressing the importance of hard work, honesty and integrity in law careers and in daily life. His visit was arranged by Nassau County Schools and Communities in Schools.

He holds a Juris Doctor from the Florida Coastal School of Law. He was elected to serve Nassau, Duval and Clay counties as public defender in 2008 and assumed the post in January 2009.

"Before you can go to college, you have to make good grades in high school," Shirk said.

He detailed his educational and professional background and encouraged students to work hard to achieve their dreams. The Illinois native noted that his personal hero was Abraham Lincoln, known for his honesty in law.

The message struck home for student Kadejah Coachman, who talked about the



assembly the following day at school. She and students Jasmine Tayag and Aaron Geiger were busy writing thank you notes to Shirk.

"I like to give advice and help people solve their problems, so that's why I want to be an attorney," she said.

She added that it's not too early to make career plans.

"I think it's the right time so I can figure out what to do now," Coachman said.

Prior to the hour-long assembly where he fielded questions from the students, Shirk said, "At that age, children are starting to take a look at what they want to do in life and it's a good time to think about paying better attention to their studies."

He said children should plan for success and prepare for the future.

"Set goals and do all (you) can to meet those goals," Shirk said. "If you want to do something it takes hard work."

Fellow student Tayag has already begun her quest to become a model by attending monthly modeling classes. During Shirk's presentation, she learned that lawyers might be asked to represent a friend or relative.

"(I learned) that you can represent people who are close to you," she said.

Shirk joked that after he became an attorney, friends and relatives began asking him for legal advice.

He's fulfilled his career managing a staff of 75 attorneys plus additional personnel who serve to protect the rights and freedoms of citizens.

When asked whether he finds it difficult to represent someone who might actually be guilty of a crime, Shirk told the students, "You've got to think about the bigger picture of the job — upholding the U.S. Constitution."

Geiger took a break from writing a thank you note to say that has yet to figure out what he wants to do for a living after he graduates. He might become an architect but knows he needs to step up his study habits to reach those goals.

"I like to build stuff," Geiger said. "Right now, I don't work hard enough so I want to work harder."

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