

Community / Clay**Public Defender visits Clay school, talks about decision making**

Matt Shirk tells young people to make good decisions.

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Provided by Matt Bisbee

Public Defender Matt Shirk visits the Golden Cougars Club at Green Cove Springs Junior High School.

By **My Clay Sun**

In a recent visit to Green Cove Springs Junior High School, Fourth Circuit Public Defender Matt Shirk urged students to stand on their own two feet and make their own decisions.

"This is the time when you are presented different directions you can take your life, it is important that you learn to overcome pressures from your peers and make good decisions for yourself and your future," he told them, according to a news release issued by his office.

Shirk, whose circuit includes Clay County, visited the school's Golden Cougars Club, which encourages positive decision-making by male seventh- and eighth graders. The group meets every other week for breakfast and discussion with a community leader.

Fourteen students, and a handful of school administrators and faculty attended for Shirk's visit.

"Visiting with the students ... was very enjoyable," he said in the release. "As public defender, we handle thousands of cases each year involving young people who are seventh- and eighth-grade age. While we do everything in our power to help our clients and hopefully re-route their lives away from the criminal justice system, I applaud the Clay County schools for being proactive and working to grow students to be positive influences on their peers.

"Perhaps the Golden Cougars are diverting a student or two away from making bad decisions and ultimately finding trouble with the law," Shirk said.

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