

Celebrating Law Day 2014

Through art and the written word, Texas students explore why every vote matters.

BY HANNAH KIDDOO

IRIS IBARRA, AN 11TH-GRADER, ALMOST DIDN'T SUBMIT AN ENTRY TO THIS YEAR'S STATE BAR OF TEXAS LAW DAY CONTEST. She didn't think that her photograph, an image of a woman with a black bar covering her mouth, holding a sign with the phrase "Voting Speaks Louder Than Words," would have a chance at making it to the final round.

"Sometimes I have doubt in myself," Ibarra said.

But the judges decided that Ibarra's entry best embodied the 2014 theme, "Democracy and the Rule of Law: Why Every Vote Matters." She took home first place, earning a spot as one of 18 students who placed at the highest level of the annual competition.

Contest winners gathered in Austin on May 1 to receive recognition from State Bar President Lisa M. Tatum and Texas Young Lawyers Association President Kristy Blanchard and to celebrate Law Day, which was established in 1958 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to honor the role of law in the creation of the United States.

The winning projects on display during the ceremony were selected from dozens of entries across the state. Local bars vetted submissions at a regional level and chose which would advance. While the student's posters, photographs, and editorials all embodied the national Law Day theme, each reflected a unique inspiration and perspective on the importance of voting.

"If we didn't vote and other people did, it wouldn't be fair," said Anastasia Burdzinski, a second-grader. Her poster, which took second place in the kindergarten to second-grade division, showed a large eagle and hands reaching out to vote.

Raul Avalos, a fourth-grader who won third place for his poster in the third- to fifth-grade level, submitted a red, white, and blue illustration of voting materials. "People should have the right to vote, and people should do what is right for them," he explained.

Diana Meza, an eighth-grader, said that voting matters because "it allows your voice to be heard and for your

opinion to have an effect on our country." Her bright illustration of a voter casting a ballot helped her win third place in the sixth- to eighth-grade division.

After awards were presented, guests heard the first place editorial read by the winning writer, 12th-grader Veronica Null. In her paper, Null cited suffrage efforts and touched on the impact that even a single vote can have. She said that participating in the Law Day contest changed her views on voting.

"In writing this essay, I convinced myself of the importance and power of voting," Null said. "I never thought about it and took the right for granted until this essay got me to sit down and really think about it."

Null was elated to learn that her editorial took the top place and to join in on the Law Day festivities in Austin. Following lunch and ice cream, the students visited the Texas Supreme Court,

where they had the opportunity to sit behind the bench and meet with a justice.

"My favorite part of this whole experience would have to be getting to come to the Capitol," said Null. "It was exciting to see that there are still some youth out there that do care about government and how it works."

To see the full collection of winning entries, go to texasbar.com/lawday.

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—Veronica Null

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