

Celebrating 25 Years of Central High School Law Magnet Partnership

Celebrating Success Made Possible by Pathway Creators and Sustainers

Laura Rothstein

As the nation celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence this summer, the Louisville legal community celebrates the 25th anniversary of the partnership between the Central High School Law and Government Magnet Program and the Brandeis School of Law. This partnership began during my deanship (2001) and built on the Louisville Bar Association creation of the Summer Internship Program in 1992, through which CHS Law Magnet students would be placed with legal employers in the summer. Many of these students continued part-time work during the school year.

The LBA's leadership in recognizing the value of reaching high school students as an important way to open the pathway to active citizenship and success should be celebrated. The LBA Summer Law Institute for high school students is an additional program that recognizes the key point in development where pathways that are opened and sustained can provide access to leadership and success that might not otherwise be possible.

The LBA programs were foundational for the law school's addition of a program that initially brought CHS students to the law school for visits and attendance at events such as the Brandeis Medal dinner. In 2006, through the leadership of Joe Gutmann, who had become the Law Magnet teacher, the partnership was enhanced by adding Street Law (for sophomores) and the civil liberties "We the People" curriculum (for seniors) and a number of other enhancements. The success of this program is measured not just by the increase in the number of Central students who have become lawyers, but by those who have become leaders in other ways.

Since the partnership with Central High School began, there have been 22 Law Magnet graduates who have become lawyers – some remaining in Kentucky, others taking their Kentucky-based roots to "the world." These graduates are now working in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Tampa, St. Louis and Indianapolis in a range of private and public service positions. About a third of them remain in Louisville and Kentucky working for firms and corporations. Many Law and Government Magnet students have gone on to obtain professional degrees in business, agricultural economics, human resources and education fields. These graduates include a principal of a Dallas high school, the HR director of a Fortune 500 corporation in Austin, Texas, a graduate of the prestigious Berkeley School who has founded a program for at-risk teens in Nashville and one who was part of the 2025 opening of Good Brothers Pharmacy in West Louisville. This past May, one of the Law Magnet students graduated from West Point.



2008 photo of Central High School students with Associate Justice Steven Breyer (during the Brandeis Medal visit) and CHS teacher, Joe Gutmann. Photo courtesy of Tom Fougousse/University of Louisville.



Photo of Justice Elena Kagan during the Brandeis Medal 2016 visit, with Mashayla Hays (a graduate of CHS, now the Law and Government Magnet teacher at Central). Photo courtesy of Tom Fougousse/University of Louisville.

Together these graduates, whose pathways were created and guided by the partnership and others in the community, are elevating Kentucky's cultural and intellectual reputation. Many of the more than 300 law students who taught in the program have taken their experiences to engage in service support activities with young people, including in Washington, D.C. and Huntington, West Virginia. Many of them are members of the Louisville legal community, including at the major law firms and in public interest settings.

The Central Law Magnet students who become lawyers follow the pathways and trails that were blazed by many other Central graduates – including Alberta Jones, who graduated from Central High School in 1948 and was the first Central student to become a lawyer. This past month, a statue honoring her was dedicated near the Hall of Justice.

In October 2024, the premiere of "A Pathway Forward," a documentary about the Central High School program, was shown in Louisville. That documentary has now been shown in other settings and has inspired others (including the local school system) to start, sustain or enhance

such partnerships between the legal community, law schools and high schools. The documentary was made possible by the financial support of many, including within the local legal community – the Louisville Bar Foundation, Kentucky ABOTA and a major leadership gift from R. Harvey Johnston III.

The stars of the documentary (sophomores during the year of filming) just graduated from Central High School. A trailer to the documentary and background story can be found on the Kentucky to the World website at <https://www.kentuckytotheworld.org/blog/a-pathway-forward-one-year-later>.

The partnership has been sustained by the ongoing leadership support of Dean Melanie Jacobs and others at the law school and ongoing UofL support through the Office of Community Engagement. Key to continued success has been the ongoing support of the Louisville legal community and the Jefferson County Public School system (which showed the documentary at its fall 2025 leadership retreat).

As we celebrate our nation's Declaration of Independence this year, we can also celebrate this program, which provides pathways to those who will be the nation's leaders.

Laura Rothstein, Professor Emerita, University of Louisville Brandeis School of Law, Dean (2000-2005) and founder of the partnership in 2001. ■



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