



## Honoring Martin Luther King Jr. A Pilot Program

The Serve Illinois Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service is committed to being a Martin Luther King Jr. champion by partnering with the Kankakee Jr. High School eighth-grade students and Kankakee State's Attorney's JUMP Mentoring Program to conduct the first-ever Justice Learning Lab Project in Kankakee. The JUMP program is a first-of-its-kind juvenile mentoring program for at-risk, court-involved youth that partners with the State's Attorney's Office with the Kankakee Area YMCA, the Kankakee County Chamber of Commerce, Juvenile Probation, local employers, and volunteer mentors.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a National Day of Service when AmeriCorps programs must participate by hosting a service event or program in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Following Martin Luther King Jr.'s beloved community mindset to transform unjust systems and the theme of United to Serve, the goal of a justice learning lab is to provide an educational space for students to learn in a real environment.

For this project, the main focus was for students to learn about the justice system, including understanding how the court system works and who are the key players. Throughout the course of a couple of weeks, students learned about the case **State of Mississippi vs J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant**, commonly known as the Emmett Till case. In their social studies classes, students dissected FBI files and evidence to better understand the case and its history.

Serve Illinois Program Coordinators, Jacob Jenkins and Cecilia Maciel Martinez, visited Kankakee Jr. High School to present to over 200 eighth-grade students regarding Serve Illinois, AmeriCorps service opportunities after high school, the importance of volunteerism in their community and social justice movements, Martin Luther King Jr's community commitment, and a snapshot of the Emmett Till case.

In preparation for the court proceedings, Kankakee State's Attorney Jim Rowe visited Kankakee Jr. High School several times to provide insight into his experience in the court system and to prepare students for their upcoming roles as witnesses, prosecutors, and jury.



Pictured Above: Kankakee State's Attorney Jim Rowe visiting students at Kankakee Jr. High School.



Pictured above: Serve Illinois presented Governor's Certificate Awards of Appreciation to participating judges, public defenders, assistant state's attorneys, and Kankakee State's Attorney Jim Rowe. Serve Illinois staff in attendance included AmeriCorps Program Officer Teesha Pendleton, Volunteer Program Coordinators Cecilia Maciel Martinez and Jacob Jenkins, and National Service Program Manager Davida Fanniel. Also pictured are Principal Morgan Harris of Kankakee Jr. High School, Kankakee State's Attorney's Office AmeriCorps Program Coordinator Cheryl Chamberlain, JUMP Program Coordinator Jeanette Wierer, and JUMP students and mentors.

On the day of the court proceedings, thirty Kankakee Jr. High School students had pizza upon their arrival and then proceeded to one of the three courtrooms, where they worked with actual sitting judges, public defenders, and assistant state's attorneys. JUMP participant students and their mentors served as hosts, including helping with day-of logistics, such as serving food, guiding students to their assigned courtrooms, and serving as the jury and general audience. All participating students will be receiving an official letter recognizing their participation and validating their volunteer hours. This experience was enriching for students, Serve Illinois, and its partners. The goal is to refine and replicate collaborative learning labs across the state of Illinois.

## A Team Effort

