

Massachusetts Mock Trial Program

Clash of young minds



Jenn Smith / Berkshire Eagle Staff

Mock trial teams from Wahconah Regional High School, left, and Lenox Memorial High School participate in the recent mock trial competition at Lee Town Hall. Wahconah won the contest, which was judged by local attorney Richard Dohoney, not pictured.

Students hone their skills in law, order and critical thinking

By Jenn Smith
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LEE

The case centered around bullying. The prosecution argued on behalf of a student who suffered a breakdown after a teacher failed to adequately recognize and report ongoing physical, emotional and online bullying.

The defense insisted that the teacher followed the school's bullying prevention policy and guidelines.

That was the scene among two teams of suit-clad attorneys in a courtroom at Lee Town Hall.

But it was students of Wahconah Regional High School and Lenox Memorial High School that made up the prosecution, witnesses and defense, while real-life Berkshire County attorney Richard Dohoney presided over their mock trial meet.

Wahconah and Lenox, along with Pittsfield High School, represent the three Berkshire County teams participating in the Massachusetts Bar Association's 27th annual statewide Mock Trial Program. The program is funded by the Center for the Public Interest in Boston.

Coaches include teacher Jared Shannon for Wahconah; teacher David Fisher and attorney Diane M. DeGiacomo for Lenox; teacher Maggie Esko and attorney Katherine J

At a glance

What: Massachusetts Bar Association's 27th annual statewide Mock Trial Program.

Who: More than 1,500 from 100 schools divided into 16 regions.

How it works: The top-scoring teams from each region will go on to compete each other, and four teams will ultimately advance to the semi-final elimination round and face off during trials on March 19 held simultaneously in Boston and Worcester. The two finalists will advance to the state championship, to be held on March 23 in Faneuil Hall in Boston.

Information: <http://mocktrial.massbar.org/>



Bierwas for Pittsfield. Together, they coach about 60 students.

Each of these schools has one trial remaining this month in their regular season. They've each participated in two trials, all based on the same scenario. This year's civil case, based on a fictional scenario, explores the level of legal responsibility high school teachers bear in identifying and preventing bullying among students, and illustrates the real-life challenge of making determinations when law and social policy intersect.

As mock trial team members, students must take on the roles of attorneys, witnesses and

experts, study the case and rehearse their strategies of defense and prosecution.

The Lenox team recently was bested by the Wahconah squad.

After the trial, Lenox and Wahconah students told The Eagle that despite the long hours of case research, strategizing and practice, mock trial has proved to them to be a fun but challenging program.

"Here, you're given a chance to show you know how to think," said Lenox senior Rhett Haver.

Mock trials aren't scored on whether a team wins a trial; rather judges rate students' knowledge and familiarity with the case based on their responses and the students' overall abilities to articulate themselves and their case in a professional manner in adherence to the court rules.

"It's fun to go to court for a day and be someone else," said Wahconah senior Seth Koczela.

The students said that regardless of whether a participant plans to be a lawyer, mock trial can help a person enhance their public speaking, teamwork, theater, research and organizational skills.

"It's also a huge lesson on ethics, etiquette and courtroom proceedings," said Wahconah junior Tim Wagner.

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