



# School Internet Policy Challenged

## 2007 Florida High School Mock Trial Competition

Was the violation of Gates High School's technology policy so severe that Sal Lantro should be suspended from school, thereby, losing any chances of being awarded college scholarships? Sal Lantro civilly challenged the policy and disciplinary actions by the Gates County School District in this hypothetical scenario which served as the basis for the 2007 Florida High School Mock Trial program. The Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. coordinates the Mock Trial program annually state-wide. Funding is provided by the Florida Bar Foundation.

Thirty school districts and fifteen judicial circuits throughout Florida participated in the state-wide program in which students researched and developed arguments for both sides of the civil case. The case, released in October, was drafted by attorneys Janeia Daniels and Susan Bodell of Tallahassee. A separate moot

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**“You just don't know what this means to us. We worked so hard.”**

-Mock Trial Student from  
Palm Beach Lakes  
Community High School

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court case was also developed which incorporated an issue on appeal from the mock trial case. Local competitions began in December 2006 and extended through February 2007. Some districts had in excess of ten to twenty local schools competing for

the district and circuit titles. Local winners advanced on to the State Finals.



*Student Uriah Ellis, of Palm Beach Lakes Community High School emphasizing his point to the jury during the final round.*

On March 31 through April 1, 2007, the Orange County Courthouse in Orlando hosted teams representing fourteen judicial circuits as they headed to court. The opening ceremony featured Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis of the Florida Supreme Court. Chief Justice Lewis encouraged students to pursue careers in which they found great happiness, as opposed to ones that might bring them the most monetary gain. He emphasized the importance of developing friendships during the competition and focusing on sportsmanship and professionalism. He encouraged students to enjoy the experience they would have participating in mock trial as opposed to focusing solely on winning.

During the opening ceremony, the Chief Justice reminded the audience of tenth, eleventh and twelfth graders that fellow students on other teams may one day show up in their law school classes or

working together. He emphasized the importance of collegiality and fair play and de-emphasized the competitiveness of the program. The presentation helped to set the



*Student Justin McConnell, of Boone High School, delivers his opening statement to the jury in the final round of the 2007 Mock Trial Competition.*

tone for a friendly three-day event and helped students to balance the spirit of competing with the benefits of meeting and enjoying each other.

After the opening ceremony, students participated in four rounds of competition in the Orange County Courthouse. Random pairings of teams established the first round of competition. Subsequent rounds employed a power matching system adhering to the national mock trial rules. Each team had to argue for both plaintiff and defense throughout the competition.

Over 100 local judges and attorneys volunteered to evaluate the students and cast their ballots as well as assign scores to teams during each round. At the end of each round of competition, these judges and attorneys also offered critiques to provide valuable

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**“This was one of the most exciting final rounds I have experienced.”**

-Graduating Mock Trial Student

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feedback between rounds. Many judges reported that the students’ poise and presentations were far superior to many lawyers that had argued before them.

After four rounds, teams anxiously awaited the announcement of the top two teams that would advance to the Final Round. Teachers, attorney coaches, students, families, and team supporters all stood in the Orange County Courthouse Rotunda silently hoping that their team would be called. Boone High School from Orlando and Palm Beach Lakes Community High School advanced as the top two teams and faced off in the ceremonial courtroom located on the twenty-third floor of the courthouse.

The final round drew many observers. The courtroom quickly filled from the gallery to the balcony with spectators and supporters alike. Teams silently waited in the courtroom for Judge Donna McIntosh to enter from the judge’s chambers. “This was one of the most exciting final rounds I have experienced”, reported a graduating senior. A panel of attorneys evaluated the two teams



*Palm Beach Lakes Community High School receiving the first place trophy and the right to advance to the national competition held on May 10-12 in Texas.*

throughout the two hour presentation. Although a difficult decision, the judges cast their ballots and a winner was selected. However students would not learn of the

outcome until the awards ceremony later that evening.

After the Final Round was completed, students returned to the Orlando Marriott Downtown to change clothes and await the news in the ballroom of the hotel.

A wide range of awards were presented including-Legal Professionalism, Best Witness, Best Attorney, and first through fifth place trophies.

Legal Professionalism awards were presented to teams that exhibited the best sportsmanship throughout the competition. Awards went to Atlantic High School in Volusia county, Pinellas Park High School/Criminal Justice Academy, Our Lady of Lourdes Academy in Miami-Dade county, and Navarre High School in Escambia county. Teams received the Legal Professionalism awards based on peer nominations.

Individual awards were presented to students that received the highest votes from judges as the best attorney or best witness. Students receiving these awards were Kara Goldberg from Pinellas Park High School/Criminal Justice Academy, Ryan Iocco from Lake Howell High School in Seminole County, Tyler Egbert from Riverview High School in Tampa, Renee Keisacker from Manatee High School, Julie Dias from Fletcher High School in



*Boone High School receiving second-place honors at the award ceremony.*

Jacksonville, and Nancy Flewelling from Naples High School. Ms. Flewelling received the most nominations from judges for Best Witness.

Best Attorney awards were also presented. Recipients included Nicola Menchetti from Lincoln High School in Tallahassee, Justin McConnell from Boone High School in Orlando, Karri Becker from Riverview High School in Tampa, Justin Ryden from Atlantic High School in Volusia County, and Matthew Perkins from Lake Howell High School in Seminole County. Matthew Perkins received the greatest



*The awards for First through Fifth Place, before being handed out at the award ceremony.*

number of votes throughout the competition for Best Attorney.

The final placement awards were presented as follows. Riverview High School in Tampa took fifth place honors; Lincoln High School in Tallahassee received fourth place; and Fletcher High School in Jacksonville won third place;

The top two finalists were brought to the front of the room and with a standing ovation Palm Beach Lakes Community High School, a title one law magnet in Palm Beach County took home the state title. Boone High School in Orlando won the second place honors. Palm Beach Lakes represented Florida in the national finals held this year in Texas.

As a student from Palm Beach Lakes Community High School vocalized after the announcement in the courthouse rotunda, “You just don’t know what this means to us. Our school has a reputation that has stuck with us for so long. We have worked so hard to destroy that perception and prove that we could work as hard as any other school.” Palm Beach Lakes Community High School is a title one law magnet with a 70% minority population. Students interested in pursuing a career in a law related field from throughout the county attend this model program. Philip Stillman, an attorney and teacher in the pre-law high school program was proud of his team and the extraordinary work they did in preparing for the event. They won the circuit competition before advancing to state.

The Florida High School Mock Trial Program strives to teach students critical thinking and reasoning skills using a law related scenario that applies to their everyday lives. Playing the roles of both plaintiff and defense throughout the competition helps students understand the justice system from both perspectives and learn how the judicial branch operates. The facts of this equally balanced case provided a forum for students to better understand the

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**“I now have a greater appreciation for the legal process in this country.”**

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-Mock Trial Student

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administration of justice and the need for a fair and independent judiciary. Teams sharpened their speaking and persuasion skills as they explored constitutional reasoning and trial procedure. Teacher and attorney coaches volunteered hundreds of hours helping students prepare for the program. Once in the courtroom, students

were on their own to think on their feet and respond to rulings by individual judges.

A companion program was instituted three years ago to improve student understanding of the appellate process. The Florida High School Moot Court Competition incorporated an issue on appeal from the mock trial case and students wrote briefs and presented oral arguments in the appellate courts.



*Matt Perkins, of Lake Howell High School, with Executive Director Annette Boyd Pitts (right) and Board President Steve Shenkman (left) receiving the Best Attorney Award at this year’s state competition.*

The Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc. enlisted over 100 volunteers from Florida’s legal community that provided over 1,000 hours to help implement the statewide program. The support of the Orange County legal community was extraordinary.

The Florida Bar Foundation provides funding for the Florida High School Mock Trial Competition. The Florida Law Related Education Association, Inc is a principal grantee of the Florida Bar Foundation. The Florida Bar Young Lawyers Division provides funding for the Moot Court program. For more information on these and other law related education initiatives, you can visit our website at [www.flrea.org](http://www.flrea.org) or contact Annette Boyd Pitts at [ABPflreaED@aol.com](mailto:ABPflreaED@aol.com).