

American Lawyers Alliance Teacher of the Year Awards Application

ALA National Teacher of the Year and Lillian B. Jarvis Teacher of the Year Combined Application Form

Awards and Deadline

This year, at our Annual Meeting next summer, the American Lawyers Alliance will be giving out two (2) \$4,000 Teacher of the Year Awards - our National Law-Related Education Teacher of the Year and our Linda B. Jarvis Law-Related Teacher of the Year for those teachers working in Title 1 schools.

Each winner will be reimbursed up to \$1,000 for travel related expenses if they decide to attend the Annual Meeting.

Further, we are most please to announce that the American Lawyers Alliance will be donating an additional \$1,000 to each of the winners' schools!

The deadline for applications is May 31, 2026.

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Name *

Randi Bliss Warren
.....

Mailing Address *

Bristow, VA 201236
.....

Cell Phone *

.....

Home Phone

.....

Preferred Email *

.....

Number of Classes Taught *

5

.....

Grade Levels *

11 and 12

.....

Please indicate what specific classes you teach: example: English, Social Studies, Humanities, *
History, Political Science, etc.

Introduction to Law and A.P. Psychology

.....

Number of Students *

140

.....

Please indicate let us know what Law-Related Education Awards your students have received *
this past year.

I had four students on my Law Club Team selected to compete at the State Level Supreme Court to argue in a Moot Court in Richmond, Virginia before a panel of Justices (one of them a former Chief Justices of the Virginia Supreme Court). One of the students won the Best Orator Award for the entire competition.

SCHOOL INFORMATION

Name of School

Patriot High School

School Mailing Address *

Patriot High School 10504 Kettle Run Rd. Nokesville, VA 20181

Title 1 School? *

Yes

No

Name of Principal/Headmaster *

David VanGelder

Telephone of Principal/Headmaster *

703-594-3020

Email of Principal/Headmaster *

VangelDA@pwcs.edu

School Email

School Website *

<https://patrioths.pwcs.edu/>

School District *

Prince William County Schools

PRESS RELEASE INFORMATION AND DOCUMENT UPLOAD

Items that Must be Submitted with this Application

1. This completed online Application Form
2. A résumé/CV
3. A summary of law-related education activities
4. Two letters of recommendation from persons familiar with your expertise
5. Relevant supportive evidence such as newspaper articles or other publications that support your efforts

Name and address of Local Newspaper for Winner Publication

Inside NOVA, Woodbridge Office:1360 Old Bridge Rd.Woodbridge, VA 22192The Bull Run Observer, 8803
Sudley Road, Suite 201, Manassas, VA 20110

Pages or Addresses of Other Digital Platforms for Winner Publication (Instagram, Facebook, etc.)


See PWCS Communications Department contact: Jim Lepp at LeppJA@PWCS.EDU

Please let us know how you learned about this Award?

My Department Chair, Lindsey Cavender told me about this award

PLEASE CONSOLIDATE LETTERS AND DOCUMENTS INTO A SINGLE PDF FILE BEFORE UPLOADING. Failure to do so may result in missing documents. Any additional documents may be emailed directly to toy@americanlawyersalliance.org.

Please upload your documents here. *

 Randi.Warren.AL...

 Add file

PERMISSION

By checking here, the nominee, if chosen as a Teacher of the Year, has given permission to the ALA to notify his or her alumni association, the relevant State Bar Association, and the American Bar Association and to post it on the ALA website and Facebook page.

*

I grant permission

I do not grant permission

Google Forms

RANDI BLISS WARREN

Education Degrees and Licensure

- Virginia Board of Education Postgraduate Professional License in History and Social Sciences
- Western Governors University Post-baccalaureate degree in Secondary Education for Social Studies content
- George Mason University School of Law, Arlington, Virginia Juris Doctor, May 1995; Virginia Bar 1995
- Union College, Schenectady, New York Bachelor of Arts in East Asian Studies 1992

Experience in Education & Club Sponsor Related Activities

Prince William County Schools, Social Studies Teacher

August 2014 to present

- Courses taught since 2014: A.P. Psychology, USVA History & Introduction to Law.
- **Fall 2018:** Sole creator, author and designer for a new countywide curriculum, Introduction to Law, developed for high school students within Prince William County Schools. Interactive and project-based curriculum where students engage with material which simulates real world law-related issues and resolve them using legal precedent.

Law Club Faculty Advisor (2016-present)

- Prepare and teach Patriot Law Club students all elements of a trial in order to compete at district level Model Judiciary Program, simulating criminal or civil trials, where students must learn to litigate a complete case in front of a mock jury.
- Since 2019, prepared nearly twenty-five teams to compete at the regional level's Moot Court appellate argument. At least seven teams from the PHS Law Club have gone on to argue at the final Statewide competition at the Virginia Supreme Court.
- 2023 & 2026 Moot Court Team State Champions (Best Speaker Award) at the Virginia Supreme Court.
- Organized both a Children's Book Drive (to place books outside of the courtrooms for children's use) and a Business-Clothing Drive for incarcerated persons (to have interview ready clothing) with the Prince William County Sheriff's Department.

County Mock Trial District Coordinator (2022—present)

- Initiated the first high school Mock Trial competition for the entire PWCS held at the Prince William County Courthouse
- Sole-Coordinator with judges, lawyers, bar association, court-staff, Sheriff's Department, PWCS administrators and club-sponsors to organize Mock Trial Competition for the past four years and ensure a smooth operation for participants.
- 2026 had the largest Mock Trial cohort to date with 16 active courtrooms with a full jury panel of students in each room. The competition included seven different high schools from PWCS.

Regional Moot Court Coordinator (2024—present)

- Supported and trained students to prepare appellate arguments in regional and state Moot Court competitions.
- Initiated the first high school Moot Court competition (appellate arguments) held at the Prince William Courthouse.
- Sole-Coordinator with Judges, lawyers, bar association, court-staff, Sheriff's Department, PWCS administrators and club-sponsors for past two years to create a panel of three judges for students to make appellate arguments where the winners will represent our county at the State level.
- 2026 Regional Round included eight rounds of argumentation across five different schools. PWCS sent five teams to compete at Virginia Supreme Court, and those teams won three separate awards in competition.

JUSTice Like Me Faculty Liaison (2021—present)

- Collaborate with local law-related professionals to create a legal justice program for high school students across the school division to provide a diverse group of students with an exclusive opportunity to learn about the challenges and rewards of a career in law and/or the justice system.
- Help select and work with students to be a part of the mock trial program as witnesses to work with lawyers in presentation of a criminal case.
- Assist in managing the day's events and the flow of 150 students attending the program.

Street Law: A Course in Practical Law textbook (11th edition)

- Assisted in review and revisions of this textbook (Module 4 Tort Law) as mentioned in the acknowledgements.

Law-Related Educational Activities for Randi B. Warren

Background in the Legal Field

Prior to becoming a teacher, I was a lawyer for nearly ten years. During that time, I had the pleasure of working with local high school students on a volunteer basis with the Model Judiciary Program in Fairfax County. This program was designed to give secondary students an opportunity to learn about our judicial system and litigate a Mock Trial. I found this volunteer opportunity to be one of the most fulfilling aspects of my career. During my maternity leave, I reflected on my career and realized one of the most satisfying things I had done was work with those students. It was then that I decided to switch careers and pursue teaching full-time. Initially, I thought I would be teaching history or government.

Prince William County Schools, Social Studies Teacher (August 2014 to Present)

Since joining Prince William County Schools in 2014, I was asked to teach A.P. Psychology and USVA History. During my first year, students learned that I had been a lawyer and asked me to sponsor a Law Club, which I happily accepted. With my background and experience with the Model Judiciary Program in Fairfax, I knew I could help students create a mock trial team and compete in Fairfax (the adjacent county to Prince William). After a few years and many successes with our competition teams, my Department Chair approached me to create an Introduction to Law class. Nothing like this had ever been taught before in this county, and it was a daunting task to propose and write a new curriculum for this idea. It took about 18 months of research and writing, but I was able to create a proposal that was accepted on the first request to the Prince William County School Board members. This curriculum is interactive and project-based, allowing high school students to engage with real-world legal issues and resolve them using legal precedents.

Introduction to Law Curriculum

The "Introduction to Law" curriculum begins with teaching students about the rule of law and its significance in a democratic society. This foundational understanding serves as a launch point for exploring their constitutional rights. We start with the First Amendment rights to free speech, examining how these rights differ inside and outside of school. Students study landmark cases such as *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*, *Morse v. Frederick*, and the recent case of *Mahanoy Area School District v. B.L.*

Students engage with the material through various methods, including Law Firm Simulations, Mini-Mock Trials, and Moot Court arguments. Later in the year, the curriculum shifts to Civil Law, focusing on Tort Law, including negligence, intentional torts, and strict liability. One of the culminating projects is a mini-mock trial for the cartoon character, Wile E. Coyote, and a tort law claim against the Acme Company for personal injury damages. The course then turns to Criminal Law and Procedure, emphasizing constitutional rights under the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 8th Amendments. A guest speaker, a detective with direct knowledge of a death penalty case, provides insights into the complexities of criminal investigations, handled with sensitivity due to the nature of the topic. Additional lawyers and judges from our area are invited to meet and discuss various topics on the law and guide students' understanding of how important legal principles are put into action.

The culmination of the course involves students demonstrating their mastery by arguing various Miranda cases in a Moot Court simulation, where they will play two different roles: one as an appellate lawyer and the other as justice. In their assigned role as lawyers, they will utilize legal case precedent to craft persuasive arguments before a judge panel (made up of other students). In their other assigned role as Justices, students must create novel questions to challenge their peers' command and understanding of 5th Amendment case law during these moot courts. The students are assigned actual Supreme Court cases and given background supporting legal history to prepare for their different roles. Typically, the growth seen from the beginning of the year to the end is quite substantial as most students are afraid to talk in front of the class in August and do not know how to prepare for the complexities of a legal argument. By the end of the year, these students appear fearless and have no problem getting up in front of a classroom and making their case in a clear and concise manner as well as in a very persuasive fashion.

PWCS liaison with Prince William Bar Association for Law-Related Competitions

Over the past five years, I have worked closely with the Prince William Bar Association to coordinate the local round for the Mock Trial Competition and the regional round for the Moot Court Competition. The Prince William Bar has been incredibly gracious during this time by helping me find qualified volunteers to participate as judges in the competition. Over time, this small competition evolved from using just a few courtrooms to becoming a very large event where we used nearly every courtroom on all three levels. Given the growth and popularity of this program, I am now working with the Prince William Bar Association to help them "adopt" this program into an official Bar Event so that this competition can continue in the well into the future as a community endeavor between our school system and the legal community.

PWCS liaison with Virginia Youth in Government's Model Judiciary Program

Since January 2022, I have worked closely with the statewide organizers for Virginia's Model Judiciary Program. Initially, only Patriot High School competed from our district in this competition, and we traveled to a neighboring county. But as word of our successes grew, I was able to work with other teachers and lawyers in our county to establish law clubs at our sister high schools. Eventually, our numbers grew quite large, and we were able to convince both our local courthouse and the statewide organizers to allow us to hold our competition for the Mock Trials in 2022. A year later, we were able to be given authority to hold our own regional round of the Moot Court and send our own independent teams to the State competition, where our county has won the entire competition for the last three years.

Law Club Faculty Advisor at Patriot High School (2016-present)

As the Law Club Faculty Advisor, I have prepared students to compete in the Model Judiciary Program, which simulates criminal and civil trials. Students learn to litigate complete cases in front of mock juries, gaining hands-on experience in legal proceedings. Since 2019, I have prepared nearly twenty-five teams from Patriot High School for regional Moot Court appellate arguments, with at least seven teams advancing to the statewide competition at the Virginia Supreme Court. Notably, our 2023 and 2026 Moot Court teams emerged as State Champions at the Virginia Supreme Court, winning the prestigious Best Orator Award. Additionally, our students have typically won their original round at this highest level.

In addition to competitive activities, I have worked with my Law Club students to gain a deeper appreciation for the needs of others. We have relied upon our law-related connections to determine the needs within our community.

For example, recently we organized a Children's Book Drive to provide books for children at the courthouse. For young children, the Courthouse can either be a daunting place or even quite boring. Giving young minds a way to enhance their literacy skills with a small library of books at all reading levels was a great opportunity for our students to get involved with our Courthouse and thank the staff for all their support over the past few years. Additionally, our club held a business-clothing drive for incarcerated individuals, ensuring they have interview-ready attire. We learned from the Sheriff's Department that upon release, many inmates do not have clean or nice clothes, which can make a difference as they try to reintegrate into society. It was another important opportunity for our students to support our community members at all levels.

County Mock Trial Coordinator for Prince William County Schools (2022—present)

In 2022, I initiated the first high school Mock Trial competition at the Prince William County Courthouse. As the sole coordinator, I worked closely with judges, lawyers, the bar association, court staff, the Sheriff's Department, PWCS administrators, and club sponsors to ensure smooth operations. The 2026 competition saw the largest cohort to date, with 15 active courtrooms, full jury panels, and participation from eight different high schools. There were over 400 students in attendance that day, along with administration officials from school district, School Board Supervisors and local government representatives.

Regional Moot Court Coordinator with Virginia Youth in Government (2024—present)

Since 2024, I have supported students in regional and state Moot Court competitions. I initiated the first high school Moot Court competition at the Prince William Courthouse, coordinating with judges, lawyers, the bar association, court staff, the Sheriff's Department, PWCS administrators, and club sponsors. The 2027 competition featured 7 rounds of argument, with 14 teams from five different schools. The winners of this regional round move forward to the final round at the Virginia Supreme Court and argue their case in front of a panel typically consisting of current and retired Virginia Supreme Court Justices. For both the regional and state rounds, students are trained to read legal cases and craft arguments to align with their fact pattern.

I am proud to write that since the creation of the Prince William Division in this competition four years ago, our County School Division has won the Supreme Court Competition all three years. I work closely with not only my own students, but with students across the County to prepare for this final round of competition so that we have the best possible teams arguing about their appellate cases in front of these Justices.

JUSTice Like Me Faculty Liaison (2021-- present)

I collaborated with local law-related professionals to create the "JUSTice Like Me" program, providing high school students with an exclusive opportunity to learn about the challenges and rewards of careers in law and the justice system. I helped select and work with students participating as witnesses in mock trials, assisting lawyers in presenting criminal cases. I also managed the day's events for 150 students attending the program. The program brings students from across our county to meet with legal professionals, to include judges, lawyers, sheriffs' deputies, police officers, court clerks, foreign language interpreters. The day starts with a mini-mock trial for students to watch, and then we have breakout sessions for them to deliver their verdict on the case. Their discussions are led by judges and lawyers who can also answer other questions that the students may have about our legal system. Students then are provided with a sit-down lunch with a keynote address from a guest speaker and more opportunities to meet with members of the legal system. This is an entirely free program for our students and

includes transportation if needed from various locations throughout the county to the courthouse. This is a large event which requires bi-monthly planning meetings along with additional outside preparation work with students who participate as witnesses in the trial.

Professional Development

This past Fall, I developed and delivered professional development to Government and Civics teachers in our county on how to use Supreme Court Cases utilizing interactive and engaging methods in the classroom to include how to run a Moot Court with students.

I was selected to participate in the Supreme Court Summer Institute at Georgetown Law School (a StreetLaw Professional Development Program), which included special sessions at the Supreme Court of the United States. This immersive six-day program brought together high school social studies teachers for educational activities related to teaching about the U.S. Supreme Court.

I also attended the Mock Trials Institute (2021) with the Street Law Program. This immersive one-day workshop program for teachers to support students interested in learning about how to litigate case by explaining the major concepts of the trial process, the purposes of trials, types of evidence, burdens of proof and the role of lawyers in preparing for trial.

Street Law: A Course in Practical Law textbook (11th edition)

Assisted in review and revisions of this textbook prior to publication as mentioned in the acknowledgements section.



THIRTY-FIRST JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF VIRGINIA

Prince William County
Cities of Manassas and Manassas Park
9311 Lee Avenue, Third Floor
Manassas, Virginia 20110
Telephone: (703) 792-6171

Judges

Angela L. Horan, Chief Judge

Carroll A. Weimer, Jr.

Kimberly A. Irving

Petula C. Metzler

Robert P. Coleman

Lisa M. Baird

William E. Jarvis

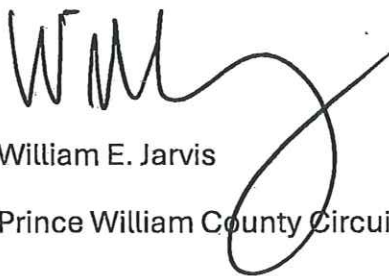
I am writing to recommend Randi Bliss Warren for an American Lawyers Alliance Teacher of the Year Award. I have known Randi since 2018 when she was the faculty advisor to the Patriot High School Law Club. My daughter participated in the club from 2018 to 2020. I initially came to know Randi because I was invited to speak to the Law Club students who were participating in the Statewide Model Judiciary Program. As a former prosecutor, General District Court Judge and now Circuit Court Judge for Prince William County, I have had the privilege of working with Randi to prepare students for both the Mock Trial and Moot Court parts of the competition since 2018. Her resume and supporting materials reveal a teacher who has gone beyond any reasonable expectation for a teacher who volunteers her time to support her student's interest in the law.

Back in 2018, the Statewide Model Judiciary Program was run primarily through the Fairfax County Bar and school system. Prince William students had to travel to the Fairfax courthouse to participate in the program. Ms. Warran single handedly orchestrating creating the program for Prince William County Schools. From 2018 to today, the program in Prince William County has grown from just a couple of teams from a few high schools to almost every school in the county participating. We used to use 4 courtrooms in the courthouse to run the program, we now use close to 20 courtrooms to accommodate all of the trials. Prince William County is one of the only counties that consistently sends teams to the Virginia Supreme Court for the final round of the Moot Court portion of the program. Every single accomplishment described above is due to the initial and ongoing efforts of Ms. Warran. These efforts required hundreds of unpaid hours on Ms. Warren's part.

On a personal note, I began working with Ms. Warran in 2018 when my daughter, Lucy, was in Ms. Warren's Law club. I would go to the High School periodically to talk to the Law Club students about aspects of trial advocacy. I was then, and am still now, amazed at how energized the students have been to work with Ms. Warran. Similar to Ms. Warran's efforts, the students also devoted substantial time to participate in the competition with no class credit and no compensation. They do it because Ms. Warren has instilled in them an unflinching love of the law. Many of her students, including my daughter, have made the decision to go to Law School. In 2018, Ms. Warren asked me and the other judges if she could use the courthouse to try to start the competition in Prince William County. She did it not just for her high school, but for every high school in the County. She received no additional compensation for her substantial efforts. She did it for the love of her students and the law.

As a law school and undergraduate adjunct professor, as well as the spouse of a college professor and Vice Dean, I have had the privilege to be surrounded by many dedicated and talented educators. Randi Warren stands head and shoulders above the best of them for many reasons, but primarily for her unconcealed love of her students. I cannot imagine a criterion for this award that Ms. Warren does not satisfy. I recommend her without reservation. Please feel free to contact me at your convenience to further discuss Ms. Warran's qualifications for this award.

Sincerely, I remain

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. E. Jarvis', with a large, sweeping flourish extending from the end of the signature.

William E. Jarvis

Prince William County Circuit Court

Patriot High School

10504 Kettle Run Road • Nokesville, VA 20181

703.594.3020 • FAX 703.594.2814

<http://patrioths.schools.pwcs.edu/>

David Van Gelder, Principal

May 29, 2026

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great enthusiasm that I am writing this letter of recommendation for Ms. Randi Warren for the American Lawyers' Alliance Teacher of the Year Award. Over the past ten years at Patriot High School, Ms. Warren has consistently exemplified what it means to be an exceptional educator. Her remarkable ability to connect with students, collaborate with colleagues, and create meaningful, real-world learning opportunities—paired with her unwavering passion for civic and legal education—sets her apart as a truly outstanding professional.

Ms. Warren brings a unique and valuable perspective to the classroom as a trained attorney, holding a Juris Doctor degree from George Mason University and having practiced law for nearly a decade before transitioning to education. This background informs her teaching and leadership in profound ways, allowing her to connect students directly to the legal system and bring civic concepts to life with authenticity and purpose.

At Patriot High School, she is affectionately known as “the lawyer who became a teacher” and, more importantly, as a dynamic and deeply respected instructor of Introduction to Law and Advanced Placement Psychology. In her law courses, students explore real-world court cases and assume the roles of attorneys, judges, and jurors. Working collaboratively in prosecution and defense teams, they analyze case facts and participate in classroom mock trials under Ms. Warren’s expert and supportive guidance. Her engaging, hands-on instructional approach has led to significant growth in student enrollment and enthusiasm for legal studies.

Beyond her own classroom, Ms. Warren has had a transformational impact across Prince William County. She played a pivotal role in developing and authoring the Introduction to Law curriculum for Prince William County Schools and has worked closely with educators to implement the course in multiple high schools. Her dedication to professional learning led to her acceptance into the prestigious Supreme Court Summer Institute in Washington, D.C., and she was recently recognized as a contributor to the Street Law course textbook, further underscoring her leadership in civic education.

Ms. Warren’s most far-reaching contributions are reflected in her leadership of the Student Mock Trial program at the county level. Over the past five years, she has developed and expanded the program into a robust, sustainable initiative that now includes eight Prince William County high schools and operates across 17 courtrooms. Through her vision, organization, and collaboration with educators, attorneys, and judges, Ms. Warren has created a countywide model for experiential legal education that offers equitable access to authentic courtroom experiences for students throughout the division. For the second time in four years, Ms. Warren had a student who won the Statewide Competition at the Virginia Supreme Court for an appellate style argument.

In addition, Ms. Warren serves as the teacher lead and primary point of contact for the Justice Like Me Program in Prince William County. In this role, she coordinates partnerships between schools and legal professionals to ensure students have meaningful opportunities to interact with diverse role models

within the justice system. Her leadership in this program aligns directly with Street Law's mission to promote access, representation, and student empowerment through civic education.

There is so much more that could be said about Ms. Warren's extraordinary talent, professionalism, and dedication. She is a leader, a mentor, and an inspiration to both students and colleagues, and her influence extends well beyond her own classroom. It is with the utmost confidence and admiration that I recommend Ms. Randi Warren for the American Lawyers' Alliance Teacher of the Year Award.

Sincerely,



Lindsey Cavender

Social Studies Department Chair

Patriot High School



www.pwcs.edu

The following attachments are screenshots along with weblinks to several videos produced by the Prince William County School Communications Department. These video productions highlight the Mock Trials held at the Prince William Courthouse, as an additional news production for your consideration. Unfortunately, because the upload for this application is in PDF, the hyperlinks will not work, but you can type in the specific links listed below to view them.

PWCS Communications Press Release and Videos

2026 PWCS students take the stand at annual mock trial competition

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCahjOqN510>



High School Students Engage in Mock Trials at Prince William Courthouse (February 2025)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjhWGDpp2ZU>



PWCS participates in the third annual Mock Trials at Prince William Courthouse

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjeAJXvwEoU>



PWCS Students participate in first Mock Trials in Prince William Courthouse

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7rczBqPUB0>

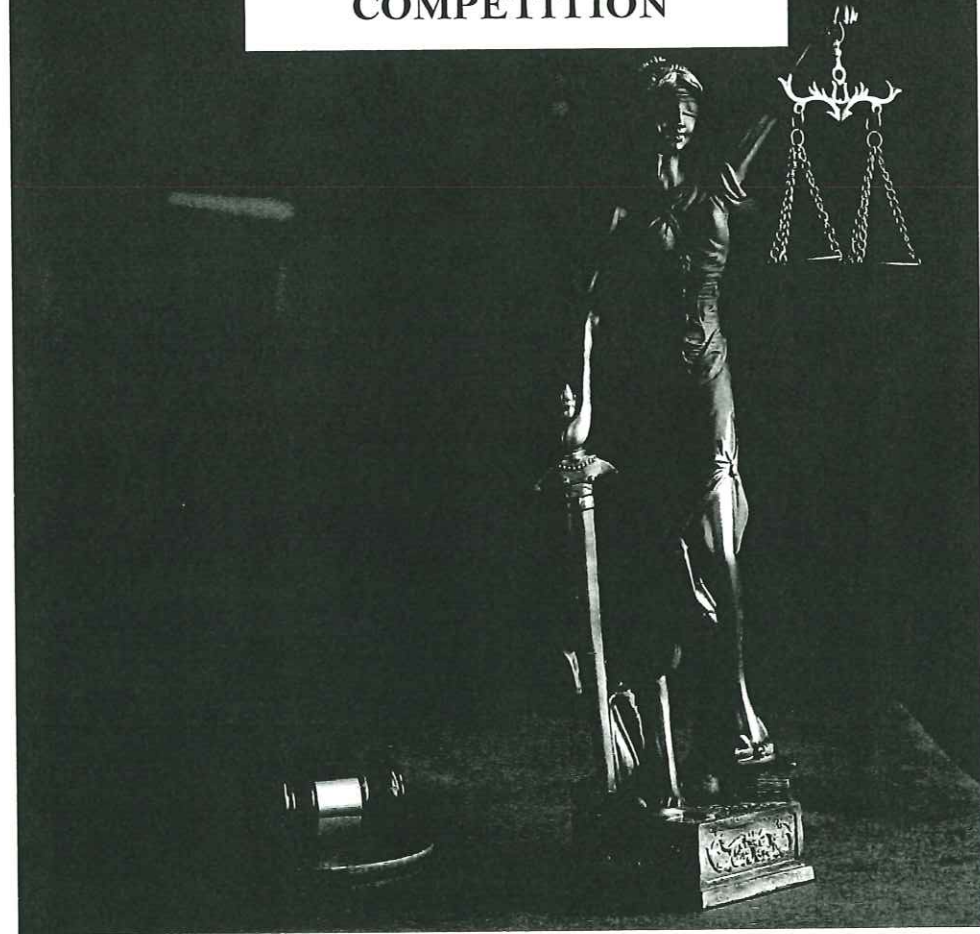


The following attachment is the most recent program for the Virginia Model Judiciary Program, Supreme Court Round. Page three contains the schools from Prince William County that competed, including my own high school (Patriot) and page four is an acknowledgment and thank you to the Regional Coordinators, which includes myself.

Virginia Model Judiciary Program

Established 1975

**2026 SUPREME COURT
COMPETITION**



V.B.A.
The Virginia Bar Association
YOUNG LAWYERS DIVISION

48th Virginia
Model Judiciary Program
2026 Supreme Court Arguments

Diamond v. Commonwealth

- | | |
|--|---|
| I. Westfield High School
Haylei Martin
Sophia Kan | Kellam High School
Annabel Schwab |
| II. First Colonial High School
Sophia Shields
Maddy Briggs | Battlefield High School
Isabel Amante
Eleanor Sirocky |
| III. Kellam High School
Rin Roberts | Patriot High School
'Neela Harooni
Zeynep Karakas |
| IV. Battlefield High School
Sakshi Gowda
Ethan Marco | Patriot High School
Erica Timothy
Camryn Niel |
| V. Battlefield High School
Rebecca Roth
Leo Stammeler | Westfield High School
Anisha Upadhyayula
Manasvini Lakkavajjala |

LePuck v. Dunn

- | | |
|---|--|
| VI. Bethel High School
Alyssah Greenwood
Kaaliyah Edwards | Kecoughtan High School
Addison Rice
Alexandra Mingee |
|---|--|

Grand thanks to the regional coordinators

Randi Warren, Prince William County

Brittany Mountjoy, Richmond

Bridget Maas, Hampton

Evan Stepanick, Fairfax

The Virginia Youth in Government Association's Model Judiciary Program exists to educate, empower, and inspire high school students across Virginia through active participation in a simulated judicial system. By engaging in real-world legal processes, students develop critical thinking, advocacy, and leadership skills while gaining a deeper understanding of the rule of law and the role of the judiciary in a democratic society. Participants advance through multiple levels of competition, culminating in final arguments before the Virginia Supreme Court, experiencing firsthand the rigor, professionalism, and civic responsibility required of legal practitioners and public servants. Through partnership with the Virginia Bar Association's Young Lawyers Division, we seek to foster a lifelong commitment to justice, informed citizenship, and ethical leadership among Virginia's next generation.

Virginia Youth in Government Association

P. O. Box 10365 | Lynchburg | Virginia | 24506

{434} 385-9117 | vayga.org

Mock trials at PWC Courthouse demonstrate to students how trials really work

By JAN DAVIS
Observer staff

Many high school students have their understanding of the court system from watching proceedings on television.

Students from seven Prince William high schools learned in depth how a trial works by participating in the third annual Mock Trials.

These were held at the Prince William County Courthouse in Manassas on Saturday, Feb. 10, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Students from these high school participated: Patriot, Battlefield, C.D. Hylton, Charles J. Colgan Sr., Gainesville, Gar-Field, and Woodbridge.

Randi Warren, Patriot High School teacher and sponsor of Patriot High School's Law Club, explained the goals of the mock trials.

She said, "First and foremost, was to have fun. Even though this is a stressful event, I tell the students that they are about to do something that most people in the U.S. cannot say they did, and that's conduct a trial."

"Second, is to learn about an exciting career in law. They learn about all facets of the litigation process, and they get to meet (real sitting) judges and sheriffs' deputies."

"Third, [they] get out of their shells and learn how to make a presentation in front of an audience."

"Even if they don't go into law, this is an invaluable experience in how to speak with authority and persuasively in front of other people."

High school students were

matched up for the trials with students from another school.

The mock trials had 250 students participating as lawyers, witnesses or jurors. Mrs. Warren had 90 Patriot High School's Law Club who participated.

The jurors made up the largest pool of students, which was more than 150.

The jurors have no preparation, and it is hoped they know nothing about the case before they participate, which is similar to a real trial. In most cases, the jurors were from different schools than their own.

Warren said she prepared the Patriot students by meeting with them weekly from September through December—covering all the components of a trial.

This included preparing and delivering an opening statement, direct questioning, cross examining and jury instructions.

"Because this was a civil trial, the students had to learn the law of negligence and contributory negligence. Students had to learn how to make objections, the hardest part of any trial, in my opinion, and think quickly on their feet.

Beginning in January, we met more frequently, maybe twice a week. The week of the trial, we met every day," said Warren.

All the schools had the same trial, which was Wilkins v. Danville School District.

It was a fictitious trial in civil court and had parents suing, because their child passed away from a heart attack induced by taking steroids.

Three people who are actual judges in their everyday lives presided over the mock trials.

They were Judge William



Brother Gavin McGregor, a Junior, and his sister, Mary McGregor, a freshman, during one of the mock trials, held at the Prince William County Courthouse in Manassas on Saturday, Feb. 10. Gavin played the role of a lawyer and Mary played the role of a witness. Photo Courtesy

Jarvis, Judge Carlos Flores LaBoy and Judge Abigail Miller.

Judge Jarvis gave opening remarks and as well as an orientation for the students competing in the event.

Warren explained the process of the trial, saying, "The student lawyers learn to address preliminary matters with the judge such as courtroom decorum. Specifically, they will ask whether they can move about the well, the floor of the courtroom, and move to the podium to address the jury. They usually argue pretrial motions to

suppress evidence they feel is prejudicial. They give opening statements, direct their witnesses, make objections, conduct cross exams, and then give closing arguments. The judges hold them to a

high standard."

The time taken to reach verdicts by the juries varied in these

continued on page 3

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Mock trials give high school students close look at how court system works

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cases. Some lasted as long as an hour and some as little as 20 minutes. Each jury did not come to the same verdict for the three trials held, according to Mrs. Warren.

"We had three liable cases. I believe those verdicts ranged from \$1 million to \$1.5 million. The remaining cases were not liable, which is probably the correct verdict." In Virginia, if you can show contributory negligence, then the plaintiff cannot win and is barred

from recovery. In this fact pattern, there was a good amount of evidence to demonstrate that there was contributory negligence on the part of the plaintiff/parent, and they probably should have known their child was abusing steroids," said Warren.

The students eagerly shared their takes on being involved in the mock trials.

Condoleezza Payan, PHS senior, said, "Thanks to this opportunity, I was able to learn more about law, but I was also able to make new friends and collaborate with other students in law club. My friends and I stayed every week to

discuss the complexities of the case and the different approaches we would take during the mock trial, which was very beneficial, because we were able to take every outcome possible into consideration."

She added, "I must admit that I was nervous the day of the mock trial, but as soon as we got to our courtroom, the police officer there made us feel welcome and instructed us what to do."

"We were also able to meet a real judge, who gave us feedback on our mock trial and explained to us how to proceed with the case under specific circumstances. I

would 100 percent and encourage other students to participate next year."

Ava Reed, senior, at Gainesville High School, said, "Mock trial has been one of the biggest highlights of my senior year."

"It felt great to see the entire case come to life, especially after all the hard work. I can't wait to do it again in college."

Natalie Ebbs, junior, Gainesville High School, shared, "This opportunity was amazing, because my peers and I got the chance to experience a real trial and work on building a case argument, whether on the defense or plaintiff side."

"I am really excited to do this again next year, and I think for the first year of my school participating, we really got our foot in the door. It is hard work, but I felt like I was in the shoes of a real attorney."

Irene Ho, another senior at Gainesville High School, said, "I believe that it was a great experience. The prep work leading up to the mock trial, and the event itself, allowed me to take a peep into what life is like as an attorney."

"This was especially helpful as it gave me a better understanding of my strengths and weaknesses."

"Judge Flores even went as far as to give both the Plaintiff and Defendant sides points of improvement that we can work on to become a stronger public speaker, synthesizer, etc., which are all skills I can carry and improve on, no matter the occupational field I go into, if not law."

The teachers also were pleased with the learning outcomes their students had.

Jeff Bergman, Gainesville High School criminal justice teacher and co-sponsor of the law club there, said, "The Mock Court allowed students a real-world hands-on experience. Input from the judges and attorneys, who were present for the trials, offered invaluable advice to the students as they continue on their path to post-secondary success."

Warren said, "I'm always in awe of what these students can accomplish."

"I personally get so nervous before the trials, because I know how difficult these simulations can be, and every year I'm blown away at how fantastic they turn out. There is so much that is unpredictable at trial, and you need to be quick on your feet and ready to pivot if something is not going well."

"Time after time, these students prove they can do it. If you could watch these students in action, you would see how ready they are for real world challenges that lie ahead of them."

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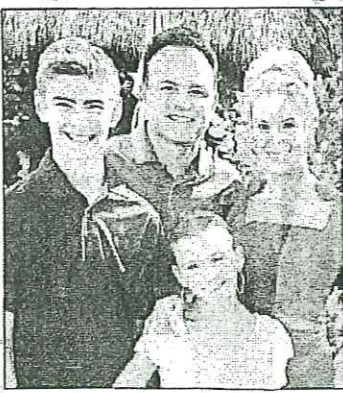
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County students shine at mock Supreme Court

Battlefield's Sampath, Gowda named competition winners

» BY EMILY SEYMOUR
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Prince William students came out on top at the 47th annual Model Judiciary Program Supreme Court round.

A group of six Prince William students participated in the Supreme Court round of the mock trial on May 1 in Richmond. Two Battlefield High School students were named the overall state competition winners, according to a news release from the school system.

Anandya Sampath, a senior, and Sakshi Gowda, a sophomore, both from Battlefield, won their round and were named the overall winners for the competition.

"The experience felt very real, and I learned a lot. Preparation for this competition revolved around practicing how to answer questions that the justices might ask and answering on our feet," Sampath said. "This victory meant so much to me because it was my last competition ever in high school."

Gowda, who served as Sampath's co-counsel, also emphasized the importance of preparation but said that can only take you so far.

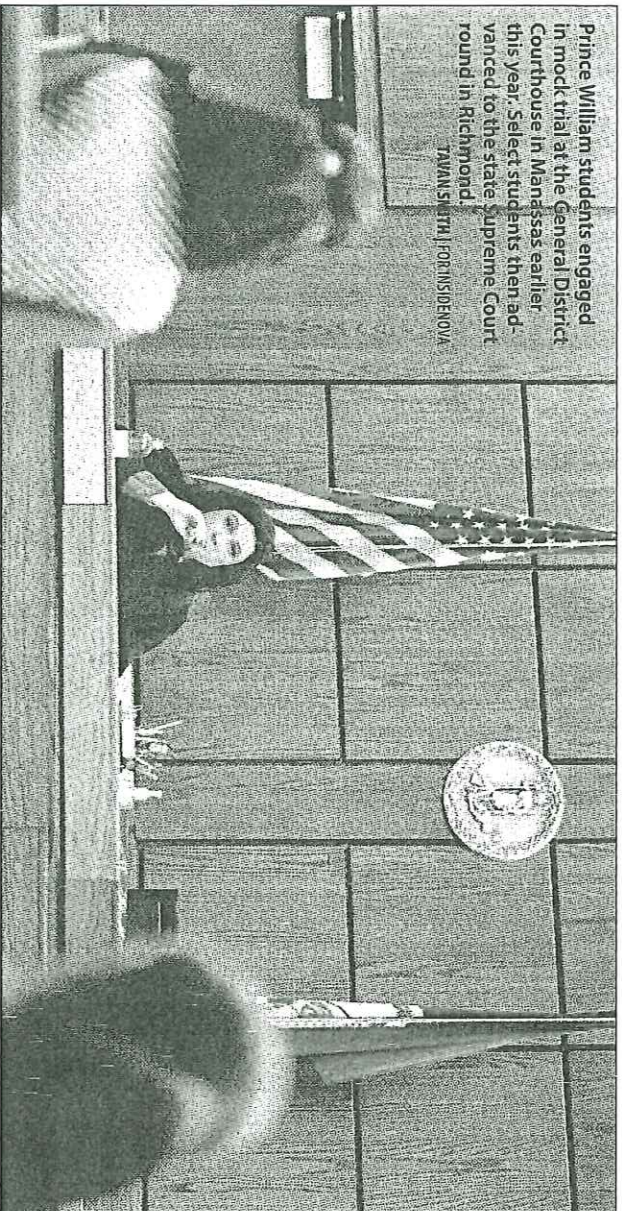
"...you can never be 100 percent sure what the judges are going to ask," Gowda said.

Juris Field and Gavin McGregor, seniors from Patriot High School, and Rebecca Clark, a junior from C.D. Hylton High School, also won their rounds at the state competition.

This is the third consecutive year a Prince William County student has clinched the state competition, according to the release, with previous victories by Gainesville High School in 2024 and Patriot in 2023.

"Our PWCS teams were very poised and handled the justices' questioning under pressure," said Randi Warren, a so-

Prince William students engaged in mock trial at the General District Courthouse in Manassas earlier this year. Select students then advanced to the state Supreme Court round in Richmond.
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cial studies teacher and law club sponsor at Patriot. "All of our students did a fantastic job, and I can tell you that none of them faltered or stumbled."

The Model Judiciary Program consisted of three rounds, beginning with a mock trial at the Prince William County Courthouse. Select students were then chosen to participate in a moot court, where an appellate trial was simulated. A handful of Prince William students were then chosen to participate in the third and final round, the Supreme Court trial.

The selected Prince William students competed against students from Fairfax, Hampton Roads and Richmond. Justices of Virginia's Supreme Court heard the case.

The mock trial program is supported by various teachers, lawyers and judges who contributed their time and expertise.

- Teachers: Jeffrey Bergman and Kara Sidener, Gainesville High School; Julie Elston and Jamie Hughes, Colgan High School; Nicole Falgiano, Woodbridge High School; Thomas Fennell, Battlefield High School; Tiffany Parra, Gar-Field High School; Kelly Schofield, C.D. Hylton High School; and Randi Warren, Patriot High School.
- Attorneys: Collin Crookenden, Chidi James, Caroline Lochabay, Steven Lofaso and Aimee Solano.
- Judges from Prince William: Carlos Flores Laboy (Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court); Judge William Jarvis (General District Court); Jacqueline Lucas (Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court); Katherine McCollam (Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court) and Abigail Miller (Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court).

