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Teen Court Volunteers Compete to Polish Skills

FORT WORTH, Texas – Although it was very early on a Saturday morning, teen court volunteers from across North Texas made their way to Texas Wesleyan University School of Law for the annual North Texas Teen Court Competition on March 7.

High school students who comprised 14 teams from seven North Texas teen courts competed in mock trials that were heard by real judges and evaluated by law students. This was the third year Texas Wesleyan School of Law hosted the event.

Participants competed as lawyers, witnesses and defendants in the mock trial cases, all of which dealt with issues that often arise in real teen court situations, such as possession of marijuana or traffic citations. Teen court is a legally binding alternative disposition program that provides juveniles the option to pay for offenses through sentences such as community service, jury terms and other requirements.

Many of the competitors participate in their local teen court programs and have aspirations to practice law. The competition is often their first exposure to Texas Wesleyan University School of Law, and gives them the opportunity to see the campus and interact with law students.

3L Joel Smith organized this year's Teen Court Competition, an event he has participated in for three years.

"I am always amazed at the high quality of presentations that these high school 'lawyers' display," Smith said. "Each team had several weeks to prepare, so the examination and cross-examination of witnesses was as thorough as you would expect to see in any real courtroom. The law students took pride in the performance of their teams in the preliminary rounds and helped their teams improve their presentations with each round."

Smith said that the teens all enjoyed working with the law students, and they showed stronger presentation skills and increased confidence following the feedback from judges and law students.

The final two teams competed in front of a crowded auditorium and a panel of three municipal court judges. The Plano Teen Court team won a close contest against the Collin County team, with the judges complementing both teams on their preparation and presentation.