

What is Hawaii's Mock Trial Program?

The Mock Trial program consists of high school teams state-wide who compete by acting as lawyers and witnesses in simulated civil and criminal trials before actual judges.

Students work within teams, supervised and assisted by teachers and volunteer attorneys, to prepare a hypothetical courtroom trial. Case materials are supplied by the Hawaii State Bar Association's Young Lawyers Division and involve issues that are relevant to Hawaii law and the young generation. While working with their teams to present a cohesive case, students are responsible for preparing the role assigned to them.

Mock trial is open to students in grades 9 through 12. Teams are comprised of at least 5 members and during each match a maximum of 10 team members may actively participate in the trial. If there is enough interest, schools may have more than one team. Generally, the mock trial case is released in early fall and teams have approximately two to three months to prepare for the competition. Depending upon the number of participating teams and availability of the courthouse, the teams compete within their circuits in January and February to have the opportunity to participate in the state finals in March.

The four circuit winners advance to a State Tournament, held at the Supreme Court Building on Oahu (Aliiolani Hale). The state winner represents Hawaii at the National High School Mock Trial Championship in May.

During the trials, practicing attorneys, retired judges and/or judges evaluate the students. Participants are judged on their case analysis and presentation, not on whether they would actually prevail in the case.

Why do we value this program?

Mock Trial is an excellent way to develop valuable skills. Critical analysis of problems, reasoning, listening, oral presentation, leadership, and the ability to work as a team are only some of these skills, which are valuable both in and out of the legal arena. In the courtroom and during practice, students use their communications skills, think "on their feet" and meet challenges as they occur.

Through participation in mock trials, students gain a practical understanding of the way in which the American legal system functions. We see it as a way to encourage and mentor the next generation of attorneys and to imbue them with the values we hold dear. While learning the details of trial process and procedure, all students, whether they may be interested in a career in the law, benefit from developing important lifetime skills. Mock trials provide an active learning environment for students and require a high level of cooperation among participants.