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For Immediate Release

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## **Battle of the Minds: Palmer HS takes first in state**

GOLDEN – Wm. Jackson Palmer High School’s team took first place in state at the Colorado Bar Association’s State High School Mock Trial Competition today, out of 21 finalist teams. Over 80 teams from around the state competed in this year’s program.

In the final round Saturday evening, Palmer faced off in the courtroom against Aurora Central High School’s Varsity team. Colorado Supreme Court Justice Alex Martinez presided over the championship round.

“I have often heard young adults express appreciation for their mock trial experience, years earlier, recognizing the experience as opening their eyes to their potential,” said Justice Martinez.

The Palmer team will travel to Atlanta, Ga. May 6-10 for the annual National High School Mock Trial Tournament. Representing Colorado, the team will compete against 44 other states, U.S. provinces and a team from South Korea.

Last year’s Colorado state champ, George Washington High School of Denver Public Schools, took nationals by storm when they earned fifth place at nationals. This is the best a Colorado team has done in recent memory.

“These kids have been working on their opening and closing statements night and day for the past several weeks,” said Palmer coach Regina Walter. “This team has given it their all and they’ve done it.”

Teams traveled from across the state to the Jefferson County Combined Courts in Golden for the annual competition Friday and Saturday, March 13-14. Students have all been studying the same, fictitious – yet highly detailed – case since September. In each round, they had to be ready to perform either the prosecution or defense side of the case, raising objections and defending clients before real judges.

Being involved with mock trial helps Aurora Central sophomore Emily Babbidge.

“I feel a lot more confident in addressing people in public. It’s helped me be able to stand by my beliefs because I can back them up with facts,” said Babbidge. “It helps me be more assertive.”

All 21 teams in Golden today qualified at their Regional Competitions, held in 12 regions across the state the past month or so.

Aurora Central coach Peter Hedeem, a criminal defense lawyer in Denver, has been a volunteer coach for the past nine years.

“I’m just thrilled for all our kids, and all the coaches and judges who helped us get here. Whether we get first in state or last in regionals, mock trial is a great program

that really makes a difference in kids' lives," Hedeem said. "I've seen so many kids just blossom and come out of their shell. We have a tremendous support from Aurora Public Schools Superintendent John Berry."

This is the 24th year of the Colorado High School Mock Trials program, sponsored by the CBA. High school students try a "mock" criminal case in courtrooms, with established attorneys and judges volunteering to score the high school teams.

Most teams are structured as extracurricular activities, coached by volunteer attorneys and teachers after school. Mock trial combines some elements involved in traditional clubs such as debate, drama, student council, team sports and honors society. Each year the process helps students develop critical thinking, public speaking, reasoning, strategic planning and team collaborative skills.

The First Judicial District hosted this year's state finals. More than 200 volunteers, besides the 100-plus coaches and 200-plus scoring panelists, assisted Carolyn Gravit, Director of CBA Public Legal Education and CBA Program Coordinator Meghan Bush.

"This is a program I really believe in. I love watching the students grow into young adults," said Gravit. "This program is much more than legal skills, it's life skills."

Scoring the championship round in special public appearances, First Judicial District Attorney Scott Storey and the Hon. Brook Jackson, Chief Judge of the First Judicial District analyzed the trial. Other panelists at Saturday's final round included: CBA President Bill Walters; Rob Busch, First Judicial District Bar Association President; Alden Hill, Vice Chair of the CBA Litigation Section Council and Kara Veitch, past president of the Asian Pacific American Bar Association.

The fictitious case is a cold criminal case, where the defendant is charged with assault, burglary and theft. Two rival university professors are engaged in a feud to discredit each other. One claims to have a long-lost journal of Zebulon Pike. The other fictitious professor claims that the journal is a fraud and is being used to damage the reputation of Pike and President Jefferson. One evening, the first professor is found unconscious with a blow to the head, and his newly discovered journal vanished from his file cabinet.

*For pictures of your local team or coaches' contact Christine McManus, [cmcmanus@cobar.org](mailto:cmcmanus@cobar.org).*

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