

Grant Use Background

I am extraordinarily thankful that I was able to participate in an expanding civics in Oregon workshop sponsored by the Classroom Law Project. The workshop alone was worth spending two days at my local Education Service District, but the Classroom Law Project went even further by providing a five hundred dollar grant that I was able to use to enhance student learning. I had originally planned to assess classroom needs at the end of the school year and use the grant to order materials that would enhance my practice, but my Mock Trial team's success at district competition, coupled with a decrease in school funding, necessitated the expenditure of my grant on my Mock Trial team's trip to the 2009 state competition.

Mock Trial is a cocurricular activity where students learn about the United States legal system by taking on a role in a simulated court case. Students participate in this activity as lawyers, witnesses, court clerks, or bailiffs. Regardless of a students' assigned role, all students learn about the court system by studying a hypothetical case, learning about legal principles (rules of evidence, hearsay, how to introduce evidence, how to work with an attorney when giving testimony, etc...) and then actually presenting the case in competition against teams from other schools. This year, the district competition was held at the Umatilla County Courthouse on February 28, 2009.

My students began practicing the third week of January. The students were given case materials and began examining the case of *Simon v. Swift and Eastside High School*. This was a civil case where a mother whose son overdosed on steroids was suing her son's high school and high school track coach for negligence. My team prepared for the case by practicing outside of school hours under the guidance of volunteer attorney coaches from both the public defender and District Attorney offices. We also had 2 private practice attorneys come and help us prepare. In

addition to attorney coaches, the students also received coaching from a student teacher and myself.

Details of Grant Use

This was the first year that I was the lead teacher coach for the Mock Trail team. Traditionally, Mock Trial practices begin after the school completes the We the People Congressional Hearings. Following this practice, we had our interest meeting on January 15, 2009 and our first practice the following Monday (January 19, 2009). I failed to realize how close we were to the date of the competition, so I was very concerned that our team would not perform very well at district competition. The other coaches shared my concern. As such, the goal of the coaches was to prepare our team as best we could and not come in last at district competition. When it was announced that our team had placed second at district and thus would be continuing on to the state competition in Portland, Oregon, I was at a loss. As a second year teacher I had never taken a field trip, let alone an overnight excursion. I also had to figure out how to pay for the trip.

Like all school districts across Oregon, the Pendleton School District has faced extensive budget cuts this year. The high school itself lost 13 staff members (both certified teachers and classified assistants). However, I knew that the opportunity to go to state competition was much more than a trip to the valley for my students.

Being able to go to a beautiful Federal courthouse, to actually see and touch the embodiment of our court system was going to be a civic experience that my students would remember for the rest of their lives. They had to go, and I had to find a way to make the trip happen. I needed to find funding for a bus and also for a hotel. I was able to secure funding for my bus from the school district, and one of our attorney coaches was able to help fundraise for

housing from the local bar association. Transportation was covered (nearly \$1500), but I was still at a loss for covering housing. It was at this point that I decided to use the expanding civics grant to pay for the remainder of the team's housing. With a total hotel bill of \$637.32, the full use of the expanding civics grant was necessary to cover the expenses of this civics related trip.

Benefit to Students

My Mock Trial team has benefited immensely from participation in Mock Trial. These students now know rudimentary court procedure, and are more likely to see our court system as a force of good and order instead of a dreaded place to pay a traffic ticket or an unknown area that they should fear. Big ideas aside, I truly believe that when my Mock Trial team members receive a jury summons, they are far less likely to complain and attempt to receive a dismissal. Instead, these students will relish the opportunity to participate in a "real" trial. Finally, I believe that the influence will extend beyond my students because they will tell their friends and family about the vitally important role that the courts play in their lives.

On a more academic level, over the course of the Mock Trial season, I saw my students develop skills that will aid them in future academic pursuits. They developed higher order critical thinking skills, improved organization, and increased their ability to retain information. I also saw many of my students developing leadership skills that I had never seen before. For example two students had never really been assertive with their peers, but over the course of the season, they became the equivalent of team captains by reigning in students and holding team members accountable.

Plans for Next Year

Mock Trial is in limbo for next year. Due to budget reductions and a shuffling of teachers, I have been transferred to a 6th grade teaching position. This creates obstacles that will

be difficult to surmount for the team. That said, I am actively pursuing ways to continue coaching the team and I will do my best to provide this experience to students in the years to come.