

Participate in the 2026 State Bar Mock Trial Program

Help lay a path for today's high school students to become tomorrow's lawyers: volunteer for the Mock Trial program.

BY DAN D. GARTZKE

High School Mock Trial is one of the State Bar of Wisconsin's most successful programs. Students receive a case they must study and present from both sides, taking on roles of both witnesses and lawyers. This year's case is described as follows:

Regan Kazoo and Montana Jake were once best friends. Their bond changed when Regan grew tired of MJ's business profiting off capturing wild animals. After an alleged injury from one of MJ's escaped ostriches, Regan files a lawsuit against MJ. But did MJ's safety failures cause Regan's injuries – or is Regan faking it to shut down and free the ostriches for good?

The several hundred pages of materials, including witness statements and exhibits, rules of the competition, and evidence rules, were released in October and can be viewed at the Wisbar website.

Teams are a minimum of six students (three lawyers, three witnesses). Each team uses two coaches: a teacher coach and a lawyer coach. The time commitment for participants and coaches varies; generally the students meet weekly once the materials are available.

It is a good idea to participate in at least a few "practice" sessions with other teams. These typically take place from December until the week before regionals.

All-day regional competitions will take place in Madison, Appleton, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Milwaukee, Racine, Waukesha, Wausau, Juneau, and Green Bay on Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026. Teams are sorted geographically. In 2025, 91 teams from across the state participated.

I coached my local high school team in New Glarus for 19 years. The experience was uplifting. The students must put effort into their

roles. I originally got involved a few years before my children started high school. I enjoyed it so much that I stayed at it long past the time they were all out of school.

Consider coaching a team, either solo or with another lawyer [at press time, a Waukesha team did not have an attorney coach and Dane and Outagamie counties needed regional coordinators]. If you cannot coach, consider volunteering to be a presiding judge or a performance judge, at either the regionals in February or the semifinals, March 6-7 in Madison. Or consider volunteering as a regional coordinator.

The opportunity for mentoring is phenomenal. Past President Ryan Billings has said that his participation in his school team was instrumental in steering him toward becoming a lawyer.

This is just one of many State Bar-sponsored programs that members can participate in.

For more information, or to find a team to coach or where you can judge, reach out to Jacque Evans at JEvans@wisbar.org. **WL**



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