



## News Release

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## Robert Vela High School Takes Top Honors at Regional Mock Trial Competition

### *Three Regional Mock Trial Teams Headed to State Competition*

Twenty-three regional high school Mock Trial Teams converged at the Hidalgo County Courthouse to try the fictional case of the State of Texoma v. Avery Jackson for the annual mock trial event. After having missed top honors at last year's Regional Mock Trial Competition, the Robert Vela High School (Edinburg CISD) Trial team came back determined to out-motion and out-object the competition to earn top honors and a first-place finish in the finals of the Annual Region One ESC Mock Trial Competition on January 21, 2018. Sharyland High School (Sharyland ISD) School earned runner-up honors, and McAllen ISD's Lamar Academy earned a third-place finish. The top three teams will advance to state competition to be held March 1-2, 2019 in Dallas, Texas.

Members of the first-place team, Robert Vela High School (Edinburg CISD) team include Adam Castaneda, Kevin Corpus, Sierra Garcia, Glenys Maldonado, Hailey Pearson, Anna Pena, Deandra Ramos, Christopher Rios, Andrew Solis, and Isaiah Segovia. The team was coached by Vanessa Villarreal.

Members of the runner-up team, Sharyland High School (Sharyland ISD) include Ross De Leon, Claudia De Rio, Daryella Gutierrez, Emilio Hinojosa, Sofia Guevara, Sua Cho, and Norberto Manzanares. The team was coached by Frank Elizondo.

Members of the third-place team, Lamar Academy (McAllen ISD) include Valeria Arguellas, Roman Martinez, David Li, David Lee, Hannah Vaughan, Diego Perez, Victoria Phillips, Alejandra Gomez, Ethan Davila, and Madelaine Guerra. The team was coached by Michael Guerra.

In one of the mock trial competition's newest events, "Courtroom Sketch Artist" category, student artists are required to document the court proceedings by depicting an actual courtroom scene observed during their team's trial. The top three top finishers were Sara Ortiz, *Brownsville Early College High School, Brownsville ISD, First Place*; Isaiah Segovia, *Robert Vela High School, Edinburg CISD, Second Place*; and Liberty Garcia, *Nixon High School, Laredo ISD, Third Place*. All three artists will move on to the state competition. As described by Texas Mock Trial Competition contest materials, the Courtroom Artist Contest aims to teach student artists about the courtroom artist profession, teach student artists about the courtroom and legal process, and help the student artist to improve their artistic talents.

In addition to bragging rights, teams will receive scholarship checks donated by the Hidalgo County Bar Association. The Robert Vela Mock Trial Team will receive a \$1,500 scholarship check; Sharyland High School School Team will be awarded a \$1,000 scholarship, and third place team, Lamar Academy will be awarded a \$500 scholarship. Judges also selected individual honors including "Best Advocate"

**Region One Education Service Center** ([www.esc1.net](http://www.esc1.net)) serves over 433,000 students and educators in seven counties in south Texas including Cameron, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Starr, Webb, Willacy and Zapata counties. Region One works to assist school districts in improving student performance, assist districts to operate more efficiently and economically, and implement initiatives assigned by the legislature or the Commissioner of Education.

recognition to Norberto Manzanares, Sharyland High School and “Best Witness” commendations to Christopher Rios, Robert Vela High School.

“Students and coaches work extensive hours studying and preparing for this competition,” says Jose J. Saenz, Region One ESC Mock Trial Coordinator. “These dedicated teams work after school, weekends, and sometimes even during their school breaks to perfect their case.” In addition to working with their school Mock Trial Team Coach, students also get advice and pointers from practicing attorneys who share their expertise with students. Special thanks are extended to the Hidalgo County attorneys, who donated their time to serve as “judges” throughout the varying levels of competition and to Judge Gina Benavides who served as presiding judge for the final round of competition. Recognition is also given to the Hidalgo County Bar Association, Hidalgo County Executive Offices and Courthouse Staff, Hidalgo County Sheriff’s Office, Texas Young Lawyer’s Association, K.C. Advertising Specialties, Inc., of McAllen, and the Region One Education Service Center.

“The Texas High School Mock Trial competition is a statewide extracurricular program whose primary purpose is to increase students’ understanding of the judicial system by providing a first-hand experience in court,” explains Saenz. “The competition requires students to address legal issues, legal procedures, reasoning skills in a “real life” setting, and productive and creative thinking,” explains Saenz. By participating in the Mock Trial competition students prepare the role of witnesses and attorneys and employ legal strategies for the hypothetical case assigned to all teams.

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